



Selected and introduced by

PETER HAINING

Weird Tales

*The first chilling collection
of stories from the world's
most famous fantasy magazine*



TALES OF TERROR . . .

There were many weird plants in that garden, diverse as the seven hells, and having no common characteristics other than the scions which the magician Dwerulas had grafted upon them through his unnatural and necromantic art. These scions were the various parts and members of human beings, living and growing on the stems! Thus were preserved the carefully chosen souvenirs of a multitude of persons who had inspired the king with distaste or ennui. On palmy boles, the heads of eunuchs hung in bunches. A leafless creeper was flowered with the ears of delinquent guardsmen. Misshapen cacti were fruited with the breasts of women, entire limbs or torsos had been united with monstrous trees, and certain smaller blooms were centred with eyes that still opened and closed amid their lashes. And there were other graftings, too obscene or repellent for narration. . . .

(from *The Garden of Adompha*)

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Weird Tales Vol. 1

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Weird Tales Vol. 1

Volume One

INTRODUCTION

There are perhaps no two words more instantly appealing or magically evocative to lovers of horror and fantasy fiction than – *Weird Tales*. The mere mention of this extraordinary magazine strikes a chord that is meaningful to a world-wide band of enthusiasts: many of whom may never have seen actual copies of it, and some who were not even alive when it passed into legend. Despite incredible odds, it spanned thirty years of publication in the highly ephemeral ‘pulp’ format, and though nowadays copies are rare collectors’ items, it still both epitomises and inspires the whole modern generation of supernatural fiction. In a sentence, *Weird Tales* was the first, and the best, of all fantasy periodicals – and despite attempts to equal it since, still is.

The appeal to a modern readership of this ‘Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual’ as it was for a time sub-titled, is easily explained: its roster of authors is now a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of the greats of fantasy fiction and, as a regular publication, it provided a continuing outlet for both established author and newcomer – a facility sadly lacking today. Yet, at the time of its publication, the situation was some-

what different: for the editors of *Weird Tales* determinedly sought out and developed new talent rather than poach existing, well-known writers as the other pulp magazines did, and – just as determinedly – resisted the temptation to lower their standards when those around them courted higher circulation figures with gimmickry, sensation and a fairly murky line in sex exploitation. This factor, perhaps more than any other, earns *Weird Tales* the highest praise and shows why its writers have prospered and their stories been remembered with such nostalgia for nearly a quarter of a century since the last issues appeared. A word of appreciation, too, should be afforded to that loyal and only barely viable group of readers who stayed with the magazine through its thirty years and supported it through the economic pressures of both the Depression and the Second World War.

The late August Derleth, author, editor, publisher and one of the most important figures in Twentieth Century fantasy fiction, was first published in *Weird Tales* and retained a special fondness for the magazine right up to the day of his death. He was in no doubt about the appeal of the magazine to himself and his contemporaries – and the reason for this – as he explained in a special tribute in the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary issue published in March 1948: ‘For a quarter of a century,’ he wrote, ‘*Weird Tales* has given those who delight in the fantastic and macabre the best in the genre, and it has remained the most consistently satisfying outlet of its kind. For all these years authors and readers have looked to this unique magazine as something very special, and, despite a welter of imitators, something very special it has remained. A magazine which has brought to the attention of its public the work of such writers as H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Henry S. Whitehead, Ray Bradbury, and many other fine writers has justified many times over its sterling reason for being and has earned its right to exist. When I began to read *Weird Tales* with the very first issue, I was

thirteen, and I had to work at mowing lawns, chopping wood, and the like to earn the quarter that would buy the magazine. Few purchases have ever given me such lasting satisfaction . . . These first twenty-five years have given us a rich heritage in the strange and wonderful: I have every confidence that the next twenty-five will add increasing stature to *Weird Tales*.'

Although *Weird Tales* was not to enjoy the twenty-five more years that Derleth spoke of, its place in macabre literature was already well on the way to being assured. Seabury Quinn, at the time far and away the magazine's most popular author, though his reputation has since declined, put his finger on this element in his anniversary tribute: 'One thing *Weird Tales* writers have in common is their ability to tell good stories well. It has been said that, "*Weird Tales* prints slick-paper fiction wrapped in pulp". However false or true that estimate may be, it is an undisputed fact that more *Weird Tales* writers are "tapped" for inclusion in anthologies than those of any other pulp magazine, that many of its regular contributors are now "names" in the slick-paper field, and that a high percentage of them have had one or more successful books published.' Had he still been alive today, Mr Quinn would find his words doubly underlined by the fact that not only do these same stories still crop up in new anthologies, but they have provided the basis for radio programs, television plays and films and not a few of the authors are regular best sellers on the literary lists of the world.

There was also, as I have said, a great bond between the magazine, its writers and readers, and nowhere was this better exemplified than in the thousands of letters that appeared in the correspondence section, or 'The Eyrie' as it was called. Here both groups, readers and writers, praised or criticized one another: readers commenting on the stories, the authors defending themselves where necessary or replying with further information where background material or inspiration

were requested. It all made for a family feeling about the journal, a kind of mutual concern for its well-being, which perhaps not surprisingly gave those associated with it an attitude of being rather special. Seabury Quinn, again in the Anniversary issue, put this 'togetherness' into words: 'The vast majority of people will tell you, "I don't like ghost stories", meaning, thereby, "I am afraid of them". A relatively small minority of cultured and imaginative readers either find a sort of masochistic thrill in having the daylights scared out of them or, completely agnostic, still get a lift from reading stories of "ghoulies and ghosties, long-leggedy beasties, and things that go bump in the night". It is for this select, sophisticated minority that *Weird Tales* is published.' A bit sycophantic, one might feel, but it does demonstrate the kinship this extraordinary magazine prompted. In the final analysis, Sam Moskowitz, the Science Fiction historian and anthologist perhaps most accurately puts it all down to 'soul'. 'Some magazines,' he wrote recently, 'have a soul. *Weird Tales* was such a magazine. Few periodicals ever inspired such loyalty from its authors and such devotion from its readers.' Certain it is that when *Weird Tales* finally died, in penury, in 1954, it was deeply and sincerely mourned by its faithful readers: and it has been ever since.



The history of *Weird Tales* is remarkable in that it spans the golden years of that phenomena of American publishing, the 'pulp' magazine. The 'pulp' was the natural successor to the famous Victorian 'Penny Dreadful' in that it provided stories of high drama on rough paper at cheap prices. The 'Penny Dreadful' had been, in the main, a weekly serial which was continued literally as long as public interest could be maintained; the 'pulp' was a somewhat more expanded offshoot evolved by a former telegraph operator from Maine called

Frank A. Munsey whose simple maxim was that 'the story is more important than the paper it is printed on'. And so he created a magazine format seven inches wide by ten inches deep, printed on rough untrimmed wood pulp paper with on average 128 pages of stories, serials, articles, etc. A measure of sophistication was provided by the cover, which was printed on art paper and presented in the most vivid colors and evocative headlines an approximation of the contents inside. American reading tastes at that time (the closing years of the Nineteenth Century) were being catered for almost exclusively by three-decker novels and the 'slicks' – magazines of high literary quality printed on fine paper and at comparatively high prices – and not surprisingly this new concept in publishing was an instantaneous success. At a stroke, Munsey had provided the formula for publishers to capture the huge, untapped market of poorer Americans to whom the novels were unreadable and the 'slicks' uninteresting and too expensive. Munsey and those who imitated him swiftly created an industry with as many different pulp titles as there were subjects to appeal to people (at one time well over 300) and until the years of the Second World War these magazines were the delight of countless millions of Americans of all ages. Although most of these periodicals have long since crumbled into dust, a handful (including *Argosy* and *The Blue Book*) have survived in different formats, and a very, very few have enjoyed the distinction of being remembered and revered to the present day. Of these, *Weird Tales* probably enjoys pride of place.*

Tales of Fantasy and Horror had appeared in the 'pulp' almost from their creation. (Munsey, for example, enjoyed such 'different' stories as they were usually headlined and they were a staple of his first 'pulp' *Argosy* and *All-Story*)

* A fuller history of the American 'pulp' magazines, including a number of typical short stories from these publications, is given in this same author's book, *The Fantastic Pulps* published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. (1975)

but it was not until the founding of *Weird Tales* in 1923 that the genre had a publication of its own. It was, in fact, the first ever all-fantasy magazine. In the tradition of so many of the other 'pulp', *Weird Tales* was started by a publisher of varied interests and 'instinctive' publishing acumen – J. C. Henneberger. Clark Henneberger was a Chicagoan who had made his mark in the publishing world by producing a magazine called *College Humour* which became one of the symbols of the 'Roaring Twenties'. The journal drew its material from college magazines throughout America and, according to Sam Moskowitz, 'to be reprinted therein carried a status similar to that of having an article condensed in *Reader's Digest* today.' To this magazine he later added several others including *Magazine of Fun*, *Detective Tales* and – in 1923 – *Weird Tales*. Henneberger had, since his youth, been a great admirer of the work of Edgar Allan Poe, and nursed the ambition of producing a periodical of modern material in the Poe tradition. His decision to go ahead may well have been influenced in 1922 when he read a story by a certain H. P. Lovecraft which appeared in an amateur press magazine. The story, 'The Lurking Fear', he felt was 'the equal of Edgar Allan Poe' and he promptly got in touch with Lovecraft and offered him the editorship of his new horror magazine. Lovecraft, as we now know, preferred his reclusive life in New England, and said no; if he had accepted – as Moskowitz has commented – 'history would have been changed'.

Instead, Henneberger appointed one of his staff writers, Edward Baird, to the editorial chair, and the first issue appeared in March 1923. The front cover was a vivid presentation of a man menaced by a towering monster based on the lead story 'Ooze' by Anthony M. Rud. (Some critics are of the opinion that this story and picture gave H. P. Lovecraft some of the ideas for his story, 'The Dunwich Horror'.) There were 24 stories and a Letters' Column in the 192 pages, and

for their 25 cents readers were offered 'The Ghoul and the Corpse', 'The Grave', 'The Place of Madness' and such-like. From the very start the pattern had been set for the next thirty years and 279 issues of a truly remarkable magazine. Instant success did not greet the new 'pulp' as it had done so many others, however, and thirteen issues later, *Weird Tales* was in a critical financial state. This was despite the appearance in its pages of several of the writers whose names were to become synonymous with it, and in time international favorites: Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and Seabury Quinn. To his eternal credit, Henneberger did not lose faith in his infant journal, but decided to replace Baird, who was, after all, basically a mystery story writer, with the now legendary Farnsworth Wright. Wright, who had been a reader and writer for the magazine (not to mention contributing music reviews to trade magazines) had a profound knowledge of literature and a deep understanding of the creative process. It was he who was to find, encourage and develop so many of the talents later to become major writers of fantasy fiction – and general literature, too. (Probably his greatest single discovery was Tennessee Williams, the playwright, whom he first published as a sixteen-year-old school-boy.) Although, throughout the entire time he owned *Weird Tales*, Henneberger never made a penny profit, he remained unshakably convinced of the value of his journal and the correctness of his choice of Wright as editor. On both counts, time has vindicated him completely.

When *Weird Tales* appeared again – in November 1924 – under Wright's editorship, it had the good fortune to follow hard on the heels of a minor sensation which had arisen about the previous July number. In this issue there had appeared a story by one C. M. Eddy (aided by re-writer-in-chief H. P. Lovecraft) called 'The Loved Dead' in which necrophilia had played a prominent part. The story apparently outraged people in a number of cities who tried to

get *Weird Tales* banned; needless to say, when the next issue appeared, curiosity among general readers was running at such a level that success at the newsstands was assured. In hindsight, one can see a certain justification for the claims that this one story may well have saved the magazine from extinction: but that is overlooking Clark Henneberger's faith and financial wizardry. This kind of lapse in taste – if such it was – was never to occur under Wright's aegis, although it has to be admitted that for the many outstanding stories he published, the editor included a goodly number that were dreadful by any judgement. He never, though, lowered his standards to include the sex and sensationalism that boosted the flagging sales of other 'pulp' during the hard years of the Depression, though both he and Henneberger must have been sorely tempted when noticing the phenomenal sales some of the other horror 'pulp' achieved by this method. The precarious state of the magazine did, however, mean that printers were often being paid only when they threatened dire action, and many an author had to wait months for his cheque: yet somehow the bond between all sides was too strong to be broken by such setbacks and the magazine carried on into the thirties and forties when it enjoyed perhaps its highest sales (still only in the region of 50,000 copies per month) and certainly its highest literary content. All this established *Weird Tales* for what it was – a prestige publication which any writer in the fantasy field, be he established or newcomer, wanted to crack. (Nothing could ever take this away, even the occasional near-nude covers which got it barred in Australia and the nipples that had to be removed for the Canadian market!)

Throughout its history, *Weird Tales* published an astonishing variety of material under the general heading of fantasy – horror, science fiction, swords and sorcery, occult, dream fantasies, supernatural, black humor, psychology, and even some bizarre crime thrillers. It did occasionally vary the

contents to catch a particular public interest of the time, veering for a while in favor of crime based stories when the 'hard-boiled' pulps like *Black Mask* were flourishing, and then science fiction after the achievements of *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding*. But always it was the readers who pulled Wright smartly back on course, insisting that theirs was a magazine for 'weird stories' and nothing else. Wright is to be congratulated on exploring all avenues to keep his magazine going, but praised still more so for living up to his boast addressed to readers that 'this is your magazine and you are its real editors'. As one can now see, they almost literally were. Again it is Sam Moskowitz who summarises this part of our history so succinctly: 'In *Weird Tales*, the title was not a restriction, not a straight jacket, but an open sesame to the creation of literary treasure, whose rediscovery delights each new generation. This bounty is the legacy of J. C. Henneberger, whose reward was personal satisfaction alone, because as a hard-headed businessman he should have killed *Weird Tales* and written it off as an unsuccessful experiment. Instead, he sold its profitable companion, renamed *Real Detective Tales*, to apply against the pressing early debt and let the magazine live to become a legend because he was convinced "that it had something to contribute" to the American literary scene.'



All his life, Farnsworth Wright worked hard and with un-failing enthusiasm for *Weird Tales*, although his health was never good and his later years were blighted by Parkinson's Disease. For a time he had an actual financial stake in the magazine, but his general business acumen – unlike that of Henneberger – was poor, and he undertook a number of unsuccessful business ventures on the side, including publishing a hardcover edition of one of the *Weird Tales* serials, *The*

Moon Terror by A. G. Birch, which, when he found he could not sell copies, he was forced to try and give away as bait for taking out a subscription for the magazine. He also launched a companion magazine, *Oriental Stories* (shortly thereafter retitled *The Magic Carpet*) which collapsed after the ill-fated number of thirteen issues. He had plans, too, for a magazine specialising in 'pseudo-scientific tales' to be called *Strange Tales*, but with all the problems of keeping *Weird Tales* afloat this never materialized. Perhaps it might have been his one real success, for a contemporary of Wright's who knew of his plans has maintained that if it had come to fruition, it would have been the world's first science fiction magazine.

In 1938, Henneberger's company finally decided it was impossible to continue, and with the agreement of Wright *Weird Tales* was sold to Short Stories Inc., a New York company which owned the popular general fiction magazine of the same name. Wright was to stay on as editor and moved to New York, where immediate economies were implemented by the new owners who wanted to see a profit for their investment. Competition in the horror story field was now strong, with the sex and sadism magazines booming, and the science fiction magazines also cutting into the market. The worry of this, plus the fact that several of his most popular authors, including Robert Howard of Conan fame, Henry S. Whitehead and Lovecraft were dead, undermined editor Wright's health still further and in 1940 he resigned. A few months later he was dead, after undergoing an operation that it was hoped would relieve his illness. *Weird Tales* would never be quite the same again.

In the November 1940 issue, tribute was paid to Farnsworth Wright by one of the authors he had promoted to major popularity, Seabury Quinn, in a concise little obituary which captured the essence of his achievement: 'If it be true that in imitation lies the sincerest form of flattery, Farns-

worth Wright has been eloquently acclaimed. When he assumed the editorial chair of *Weird Tales* almost twenty years ago he was a lone adventurer setting out to bring a highly specialized form of entertainment to the reading public. A recent issue of *Author & Journalist* lists twenty-two magazines devoted exclusively to fantasy or pseudo-scientific fiction. Could any greater or more sincere compliment be paid his vision and work?"

Wright's job as Editor was now handed over by the proprietors to a woman, Dorothy McIlwraith who though she was an experienced journalist and editor, had no particular knowledge of outré fiction. Nonetheless, she pitched herself wholeheartedly into running the magazine, which for financial reasons was now restricted to bi-monthly, and introduced a number of innovations. She dropped the 'Weird Story Reprint' which Wright had initiated to bring back into print some of the earlier stories and which had in the main been popular with readers. (This was, no doubt, a ploy on Wright's part to save on his budget, for he quite often included out-of-copyright items by such as Poe, de Maupassant, and Alexandre Dumas. He even ran 'Frankenstein' on one occasion but was so roundly condemned by readers that he decided against following it up with 'Dracula'.) Surprisingly, Miss McIlwraith also stopped printing readers' letters in 'The Eyrie', turning this over entirely to her writers to comment on their stories. The customers could still have their say, however, in the 'Weird Tales Club' which she founded and which ran long lists of names of all those who had signed up. She further introduced a number of special features – things that Wright had frowned on – including 'It Happened to Me' in which readers reported allegedly true psychic experiences, and a one or two page spread in which the popular new artist Lee Brown Coye brought his grotesque talent to bear on witchcraft, vampires, werewolves and similar subjects. Poetry, which Wright had encouraged, also became

much less in evidence.* As an editor, Dorothy McIlwraith's ability varied considerably: she had a much more restricted idea than Wright of what was 'weird', but was certainly his superior when it came to blurb writing for the stories. Like Wright she printed a fair amount of trash, and tried unsuccessfully to introduce humorous tales, but was similarly responsible for nurturing several major talents including Fritz Leiber, Theodore Sturgeon and Ray Bradbury, and promoting to American readers a number of English fantasy writers including Algernon Blackwood, Eric Frank Russell and H. Russell Wakefield. She championed her own sex, too, and published many fine stories by Mary Elizabeth Counselman, Alison V. Harding and Margaret St Clair.

By the early 1950s it was becoming increasingly clear that *Weird Tales* was in serious trouble once more. Fantasy fiction as a whole was going out of favor with the general public, and economics were severely hampering the kind of material Dorothy McIlwraith could buy. So, reversing her previous decision she fell back on the old Wright stand-by of reprints, resurrecting amongst others the main story from the very first issue of *Weird Tales*, Ooze, by Anthony Rud. (This story is reprinted as the final item in this selection – a more fitting and apposite tale I do not think one could find!) But to little avail, and in a last ditch effort to save the magazine it was reduced in size to that of the digest publications in September 1953. Somehow, by a mixture of grim determination and the loyalty of readers, the magazine staggered on for another year, and then finally expired in September 1954. Two months later, the proprietors, Short Stories Inc., filed bank-

* Although the quality of verse in *Weird Tales* varied enormously, poems of real style did appear on occasions, usually filling up pages where the stories had run short. Among the best poets were Robert Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, all of whom were to have collections of their work published in hardcovers. The greatest success of any *Weird Tales* poet, however, was that of Miss Leah Bodine Drake who won a Pulitzer Prize for a volume of her verse.

ruptcy proceedings, showing liabilities of \$140,237 and assets of just \$250. A magazine and an era in fantasy fiction was finally over: this time there could be no reprieve. But, beyond any shadow of doubt, an enduring legend was just beginning . . .



Today, as I intimated at the very start of this introduction, the legend of *Weird Tales* has grown to the point where it dominates modern fantasy fiction. Copies of the actual publication are becoming scarcer with each passing year, yet every new generation of fantasy fans accords it still greater acclaim when they encounter the writers who earned their reputations in its pages and whose stories form the backbone of virtually all modern anthologies. A complete set of *Weird Tales* is the prized possession of no more than a handful of individuals throughout the world, and even lengthy runs from its thirty-odd years are few and far between. The passing years have combined to commit many copies to dust or decay, and those that remain are rapidly fading and in need of the most careful handling to preserve them further. As the fortunate possessor of an extensive collection of copies of the magazine, it has been my pleasure and privilege to prepare this selection from the actual pages of *Weird Tales* so that both the new fantasy fan and long-time admirer might revel again in the magic of this publication. My selection has been made with a number of factors in mind. Firstly, I wanted this assembly to bear a physical resemblance to a complete issue of *Weird Tales* – hence the opening pages of the compilation contain complete stories, untrameled by any other matter, then as we move further on, we find the appearance of poetry, letters, special features and so on. Secondly, I wanted as complete as possible a coverage of the famous writers who earned the magazine its reputation. Restrictions of space

obviously make it impossible to include every major figure, but I think you will find that not many are missing. I wanted, also, to try and include as much material as I could that had not appeared in other anthologies: a tall order, of course, for as I have said, the magazine has been the major source of supply for anthologists ever since it ceased publication. Yet, perhaps aided by the fact that extensive runs of the magazine are hard to locate, I believe I have been really very successful, and probably only the most dedicated and widely-read student of fantasy fiction will be able to claim to have read the majority of the items herein. Thirdly, I have tried to select material covering as much of the span of *Weird Tales* as possible, beginning in the golden years of the thirties, running through the alternately good and bad forties, into the final decline in the early fifties. You will find much that is outstanding here, and even those items which are quite clearly minor compositions by comparison with their creator's later work, still endowed with the talent which was later to flower so successfully, and fascinating in their insight into a very special era of fantasy fiction. What is contained in these pages is just a little of the magic that made *Weird Tales* the legend it now is.

No point would be served, I believe, in going into lengthy detail about the contributors, although a few notes with particular reference to them and their contributions here might not be amiss. EDMOND HAMILTON, who opens the collection with a most suitable story, 'The Man Who Returned', was one of the most popular of all *Weird Tales* writers: perhaps even the most popular according to Sam Moskowitz. Certainly he consistently topped the readers' polls, and was described by a crowing Farnsworth Wright as 'a genius discovered – the supreme master of the weird scientific story'. He wrote 84 stories in all for the magazine – including four under the pen-name of Hugh Davidson – and enjoyed the rare distinction of never having had a single story he sub-

mitted to the periodical rejected. If any other writers challenged Hamilton's position of pre-eminence, they were probably ROBERT E. HOWARD and SEABURY QUINN. Howard is, of course, universally famous as the creator of the sword and sorcery genre with his great character, Conan, yet he also wrote a variety of fantasy and horror stories among his 65 contributions, plus several other items in collaboration and under pen-names. He first entered the pages of *Weird Tales* at nineteen, and soon demonstrated himself as a superb storyteller delighting in high adventure, vivid action and possessing an almost ghoulish delight in savagery and blood-letting. Howard was undoubtedly a strange and complex young man, and in 1936 he committed suicide in his Texas home – much to the dismay of fellow writers and fans alike. H. P. Lovecraft penned an obituary for the October issue of *Weird Tales* in which he said, 'Scarcely anybody else in the "pulp" field had quite the driving zest and spontaneity of Robert E. Howard. He put himself into everything he wrote – and even when he made outward concessions to pulp standards he had a wholly unique inner force and sincerity which broke through the surface and placed the stamp of his personality on the ultimate product. Others' efforts seemed pallid by contrast. Weird fiction certainly has occasion to mourn.' Also competing for top honours with Hamilton and Howard was Seabury Quinn, today little known, but during the span of *Weird Tales* hugely praised for his fantasy stories and a series of adventures about a psychic detective, Jules de Grandin, clearly patterned on Sherlock Holmes. In hindsight, much that Quinn wrote was hack work, although readers loved him and one wrote in 1933 that he was 'the best writer since Poe'. Quinn had a most appropriate job for a writer of weird fiction – he was the editor of the trade journal for morticians called *Casket & Sunnyside* – and said in one issue of 'The Eyrie' that he wrote in an office 'surrounded by little leering devils, and stuffed bats and pictures

of beautiful girls being dragged off by ape men'. Quinn began contributing to *Weird Tales* in the first year of its existence, becoming far and away its most prolific writer with a total of 182 items, of which 93 featured de Grandin and his Watson-like assistant Dr Trowbridge.

Although H. P. LOVECRAFT may well now be the most famous writer associated with *Weird Tales*, he certainly never quite made the number one position with its readers during its lifetime. His strange stories of the Cthulhu Mythos are, however, the center of an international cult today, and with the possible exception of Edgar Allan Poe, no other American writer of fantasy fiction has been the subject of such posthumous discussion and controversy. Lovecraft lived a reclusive life, earning much of his income from revision work, while devoting an inordinate amount of his time to correspondence with other writers of macabre fiction and patiently encouraging talented and not-so-talented authors who deluged him with their work. After his death in 1937, stories and poetry by Lovecraft continued to appear in *Weird Tales*, primarily submitted by AUGUST DERLETH, a fellow contributor and the man mainly responsible through his Arkham House publishing company for putting H.P.L. into hardcovers and promoting him and his work to international fame. Derleth was himself a prolific contributor to the magazine, writing 116 stories himself, not to mention numerous collaborations and other items under pen-names. Although the quality of Derleth's fiction varied considerably, but could be quite good, he saw his major mission in the field as promoting the work of Lovecraft and other similar writers through the books of Arkham House. He made this clear in a letter to Dorothy McIlwraith which appears in 'The Eyrie' in March 1944: 'I should make it clear that I am not claiming the mantle of Lovecraft has fallen upon my shoulders. It is only that, having worked with H.P.L.'s materials and works for so long in connection with Arkham House, I am at

last heeding his admonition to develop the vein he opened.'

Another writer in the same exotic vein as Lovecraft was CLARK ASHTON SMITH, who first appeared in *Weird Tales* with poetry, yet built his lasting reputation on 69 stories of consistently high quality and vivid imagination. Set mainly in imaginary lands, the tales demonstrated Smith's love of the bizarre and his invention of almost unpronounceable but intriguing words and phrases. He called his fiction, 'stories of exotic beauty, horror, terror, strangeness, irony and satire' and readers loved them. HENRY KUTTNER, who began his contributions to the magazine as an unashamed disciple of H. P. Lovecraft, earned instantaneous fame with his very first published story, 'The Graveyard Rats' (1936), a gruesome tale of the fate which befell an old graveyard watchman at the teeth of marauding rats. Kuttner never again quite equalled the power of this story, although he became very highly rated when, after the death of Robert Howard, he created a new swords and sorcery superhero in Elak of Atlantis. Kuttner later married another *Weird Tales* contributor, Catherine Moore (of 'Northwest Smith' fame) and both were lured into the highly lucrative business of writing film scripts for Hollywood.

Other than Catherine Moore – who was always given the by-line of C. L. Moore – *Weird Tales* had only one other major female writer during its first decade, a young English-woman, Gladys Gordon Trenery, who contributed nineteen excellent stories to the magazine. Like Miss Moore, she also hid her sex behind a pen-name, G. G. PENDARVES.

Considering the quiet, almost reclusive lives which most of these men and women lived, it is a tribute to their storytelling that they were able to make their far-flung locations believable to their readers. Few of them had been to any of the exotic places they wrote about, and much of the detail was based either on reading or sheer imagination. (That few readers had probably been to the places either, also un-

doubtedly helped in carrying the picture across.) There were exceptions, of course, and one of the most notable was HENRY S. WHITEHEAD, who had lived in the West Indies and based much of his fiction on the lore and legends of those islands. Whitehead, who was actually an Episcopalian Minister, began drawing on his knowledge and contributing to *Weird Tales* almost from the onset of its publication, and he became an early favorite of readers and writers alike. Such was the authenticity of his stories – like the superb ‘Passing of a God’ which appeared in January 1931 and was then reprinted again just seven years later – that ‘The Eyrie’ carried a lengthy pen portrait of his life and concluded that, ‘two of Mr Whitehead’s personal friends are popularly believed to be werewolves!’

Other than writers, *Weird Tales* over the years also opened its pages – not forgetting its cover – to a string of fine artists. For those who have seen original copies of the magazines, the covers of artist Margaret Brundage probably remain most vividly in the memory. Although her near-nude women transfixed with horror before some lash-wielding fiend or monstrous creature were far removed from reality, her colorful artwork caught the eye and certainly made the magazine stand out from a host of others on the newsstand.

Inside, the supreme pen and ink artist was undoubtedly Virgil Finlay, who was one of the most consistent illustrators during the thirties and forties, and in 1938 began a lengthy series of full-page illustrations based on verses from famous ‘weird’ poems. Other top flight contributors included Frank Utpatel (who drew many of the jackets for Arkham House books), Harold S. Delay, Jayem Wilcox, Jim Mooney, Harry Ferman, John Giunta, Boris Dolgov, Fred Humiston, J. R. Eberle, Vincent Napoli, the gruesome Lee Brown Coye and the ‘fantastical’ Hannes Bok, whose work was highly esteemed by Ray Bradbury among others, and is now being keenly collected. Until the late 1930s it was only the sketches of

artists like these that enlivened the magazine's pages of double column type; after that date advertisers were slowly convinced of the value of the publication in reaching a market, and they eventually displayed everything from fantasy books to shaving cream, false teeth to government jobs and cut-price bargains to sex aids! In truth, at the peak of its popularity, all life was to be found in the pages of *Weird Tales*!

Sadly, though, *Weird Tales* has long since ceased to be with us, and hence this memorial to its fame has been raised. I hope it will be read with nostalgia and delight by those old enough to remember when the original on its rough wood paper appeared month after month; and with fascination and interest by those younger souls to whom it is just a famous title. For *Weird Tales* has already lived on in public memory for a quarter of a century; with this unique contribution to its legend I hope it will continue to do so for at least that time again.

PETER HAINING

The Man Who Returned

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The story of a man who was laid away in his coffin, and the unexpected reception he got when he returned to his friends.

John Woodford in his first moments of returning consciousness was not aware that he was lying in his coffin. He had only a dull knowledge that he lay in utter darkness and that there was a close, heavy quality in the air he breathed. He felt very weak and had only a dim curiosity as to where he was and how he had come there.

He knew that he was not lying in his bedroom at home, for the darkness there was never so complete as this. Home? That memory brought others to John Woodford's dulled brain and he recalled his wife now, and his son. He remembered too that he had been ill at home, very ill. And that was all that he could remember.

What was this place to which he had been brought? Why was the darkness so complete and the silence so unbroken, and why was there no one near him? He was a sick man, and they should have given him better care than this. He lay with a dull irritation at this treatment growing in his mind.

Then he became aware that breathing was beginning to

hurt his lungs, that the air seemed warm and foul. Why did not someone open a window? His irritation grew to such a point that it spurred his muscles into action. He put out his right hand to reach for a bell or a light-button.

His hand moved slowly only a few inches to the side and then was stopped by an unyielding barrier. His fingers feebly examined it. It seemed a solid wall of wood or metal faced with smooth satin. It extended all along his right side, and when he weakly moved his other arm he found a similar wall on that side too.

His irritation gave way to mystification. Why in the world had they put him, a sick man, into this narrow place? Why, his shoulders rubbed against the sides on either side. He would soon know the reason for it, he told himself. He raised up to give utterance to a call that would bring those in attendance on him.

To his utter amazement his head bumped against a similar silk-lined wall directly above his face. He raised his arms in the darkness and discovered with growing astonishment that this wall or ceiling extended above him from head to foot, like those on either side. He lay upon a similar silk-padded surface. Why in the name of all that was holy had they put him into a silk-lined box like this?

Woodford's brain was puzzling this when a minor irritation made itself felt. His collar was hurting him. It was a high, stiff collar and it was pressing into the flesh of his neck. But this again was mystery – that he should be wearing a stiff collar. Why had they dressed a sick man in formal clothes and put him into this box?

Suddenly John Woodford shrieked, and the echoes of his scream reverberated around his ears like hideous, demoniac laughter. He suddenly knew the answer to it all. He was not a sick man any more at all. He was a dead man! Or at least they had thought him dead and had put him into this coffin and closed it down! He was buried alive!

The fears of his lifetime had come true; his secret, dark forebodings were hideously realized. From earliest childhood he had feared this very horror, for he had known himself subject to cataleptic sleeps hardly to be distinguished from death. He had had nightmares of premature burial. Even after the proneness to the cataleptic condition seemed to have left him, his fears had clung to him.

He had never told his wife or son of his fears, but they had persisted. They had inspired him to exact a promise that he would not be embalmed when buried, and would be interred in his private vault instead of in the earth. He had thought that in case he were not really dead these provisions might save his life, but now he realized that they only laid him open to the horrible fate he had dreaded. He knew with terrible certainty that he lay now in his coffin in the stone vault in the quiet cemetery. His screams could not be heard outside the vault, probably not even outside the coffin. As long as he had lain in cataleptic sleep he had not breathed, but now that he was awake and breathing, the air in the coffin was rapidly being exhausted and he was doomed to perish of suffocation.

John Woodford went temporarily mad. He screamed with fear-choked throat, and as he shrieked he clawed with hands and feet at the unyielding satin-covered surfaces around and above him. He beat upward as best he could upon the coffin's lid with his clenched fists, but the heavy fastenings held firm.

He yelled until his throat was too swollen to give utterance to further sound. He clawed at the top until he broke his nails against the metal behind the silk padding. He raised his head and beat against the top with it until he fell back half-stunned.

He lay exhausted for moments, unable to make further efforts. In his brain marched a hideous pageant of horrors. The air seemed much closer and hotter now, seemed to burn

his lungs with each breath he inhaled. With sudden return of his frenzy he shrieked and shrieked again.

This would not do. He was in a horrible situation but he must do the best he could not to give way to the horror. He had not many minutes left and he must use them in the most rational way possible to try to escape his terrible prison.

With this resolution a little calm came to him and he began to test his powers of movement. He clenched his fists again and hammered upward. But this did no good. His arms were jammed so close against his body by the coffin's narrowness that he could not strike a strong blow, nor had he any leverage to push strongly upward.

What about his feet? Feverishly he tried them, but found his kicks upward even less powerful. He thought of hunching up his knees and thus bursting up the lid, but found that he could not raise his knees high enough, and that when he pressed upward with them against the lid his feet simply slid away on the smooth silk of the coffin's bottom.

Now the breaths he drew seared his lungs and nostrils and his brain seemed on fire. He knew his strength was waning and that before long he would lose consciousness. He must do whatever he could swiftly. He felt the soft silk about him and the dreadful irony of it came home to him – he had been placed so lovingly in this death-trap!

He tried to turn on his side, for he thought now that he might use his shoulders to heave up against the lid. But turning was not easy in the cramped coffin and had to be accomplished by a myriad little hitching movements, an infinitely slow and painful process.

John Woodford hitched and squirmed desperately until he lay on his left side. He found then that his right shoulder touched the lid above. He braced his left shoulder on the coffin's bottom and heaved upward with all his strength. There was no result: the lid seemed as immovable as ever.

He heaved again, despair fast filling his heart. He knew that very soon he would give way and shriek and claw. There was already a ringing in his ears. He had not many minutes left. With the utter frenzy of despair he heaved upward again with his shoulder.

This time there was a grating sound of something giving above. The sound was like the wild peal of thousands of bells of hope to John Woodford's ears. He heaved quickly again and again at the lid. Paying no attention to the bruising of his shoulder, he pressed upward with every ounce of his strength.

There was another grating sound, then a snap of metal fastenings breaking, and as he shoved upward with convulsive effort the heavy metal lid swung up and over and struck the stone wall with a deep clang. A flood of cold air struck him. He struggled up over the coffin's side, dropped a few feet to a stone floor, and lay in a huddled mass.

It was minutes before he had mastered himself and summoned enough strength to stand up. He stood inside a little vault that held no coffin but his own. Its interior was in darkness save for a dim shaft of starlight that came through a tiny window high up in one wall.

John Woodford stumbled to the vault's heavy iron doors and fumbled at their lock. He had an uncontrollable horror of this place that had almost been the scene of his perishing. The coffin there on the shelf with its lid leaning against the stone wall seemed gaping for him with its dark, cavernous mouth.

He worked frantically at the lock. What if he were not able to escape from the vault? But the heavy lock was easily manipulated on the inside, he found. He managed to turn its tumbler and shoot its bar and then the heavy iron doors swung open. John Woodford stepped eagerly out into the night.

He stopped on the vault's threshold, closing the doors

behind him and then looking forth with inexpressible emotions. The cemetery lay in the starlight before him as a dim, ghostly city of looming monuments and vaults. Little sheets of ice glinted here and there in the dim light, and the air was biting in its cold. Outside the cemetery's low wall blinked the lights of the surrounding city.

Woodford started eagerly across the cemetery, unheeding of the cold. Somewhere across the lights of the city was his home, his wife, and somewhere his son – thinking him dead, mourning him. How glad they would be when he came back to them, alive! His heart expanded as he pictured their amazement and their joy at his return.

He came to the low stone wall of the cemetery and clambered quickly over it. It was apparently well after midnight, for the cars and pedestrians in sight in this suburban section were few.

Woodford hurried along the street. He passed people who looked at him in surprise, and only after some time did he realize the oddness of his appearance. A middle-aged man clad in a formal suit and lacking hat and overcoat was an odd person to meet on a suburban street on a winter midnight.

But he paid small attention to their stares. He did turn up the collar of his frock coat to keep out the cold. But he hardly felt the frigid air in the emotions that filled him. He wanted to get home, to get back to Helen, to witness her stupefaction and dawning joy when she saw him returned from the dead, living.

A street-car came clanging along and John Woodford stepped quickly out to board it, but almost as quickly stepped back. He had mechanically thrust his hand into his pocket and found it quite empty. That was to be expected, of course. They didn't put money in a dead man's clothes. No matter, he would soon be there on foot.

As he reached the section in which his home was located, he glanced in a store window in passing and saw on a tear-sheet calendar a big black date that made him gasp. It was a date ten days later than the one he last remembered. He had been buried in the vault for more than a week!

More than a week in that coffin! It seemed incredible, terrible. But that did not matter now, he told himself. It would only make the joy of his wife and son the greater when they found he was alive. To Woodford himself it seemed as though he were returning from a journey rather than from the dead.

Returned from the dead! As he hastened along the tree-bordered street on which his home was located, he almost laughed aloud as he thought of how amazed some of his friends would be when they met him. They would think him a ghost or a walking corpse, would perhaps shrink in terror from him at first.

But that thought brought another: he must not walk in on Helen too abruptly. The husband she had buried ten days ago must not appear too suddenly or the shock might easily kill her. He must contrive somehow to soften the shock of his appearance, must make sure that he did not startle her too much.

With this resolve in mind, when he reached his big house set well back from the street, Woodford turned aside through the grounds instead of approaching the front entrance. He saw windows lighted in the library of the house and he went toward them. He would see who was there, would try to break the news of his return gently to Helen.

He silently climbed onto the terrace outside the library windows and approached the tall casements. He peered in.

Through the silken curtains inside he could clearly see the room's soft-lit interior, cozy with the shelves of his books and with the lamps and fireplace.

Helen, his wife, sat on a sofa with her back partly toward

the window. Beside her sat a man that Woodford recognized as one of their closest friends, Curtis Dawes.

Sight of Dawes gave Woodford an idea. He would get Dawes outside in some way and have him break the news of his return to Helen. His heart was pounding at sight of his wife.

Then Curtis Dawes spoke, his words dimly audible to Woodford outside the window. 'Happy, Helen?' he was asking.

'So happy, dear,' she answered, turning toward him.

Out in the darkness Woodford stared in perplexed wonder. How could she be happy when she thought her husband dead and buried?

He heard Curtis Dawes speaking again. 'It was a long time,' the man was saying. 'Those years that I waited, Helen.'

She laid her hand tenderly on his. 'I know, and you never said a word. I respected so your loyalty to John.'

She looked into the fire musingly. 'John was a good husband, Curt. He really loved me and I never let him guess that I didn't love him, that it was you, his friend, I loved. But when he died I couldn't feel grief. I felt regret for his sake, of course, but underneath it was the consciousness that at last you and I were free to love each other.'

Dawes's arm went tenderly around her shoulder. 'Darling, you don't regret that I talked you into marrying me right away? You don't care that people may be talking about us?'

'I don't care for anything but you,' she told him. 'John was dead, young Jack has his own home and wife, and there was no reason in the world why we should not marry. I'm glad that we did.'

In the darkness outside the window a stunned, dazed John Woodford saw her lift an illumined face toward the man's.

'I'm proud to be your wife at last, dear, no matter what anyone may say about us,' he heard.

*

Woodford drew slowly back from the window. He paused in the darkness under the trees, his mind shaken, torn.

So *this* was his homecoming from the tomb? This was the joy he had anticipated in Helen when he returned?

It couldn't be the truth! His ears had deceived him – Helen could not be the wife of Curtis Dawes! Yet part of his mind told him remorselessly that it was true.

He had always sensed that Helen's feeling for him was not as strong as his for her. But that she had loved Dawes he had never dreamed. Yet now he remembered Dawes's frequent visits, the odd silences between him and Helen. He remembered a thousand trifles that spoke of the love which these two had cherished for each other.

What was he, John Woodford, to do? Walk in upon them and tell them that they had been premature in counting him dead, that he had come back to claim his position in life and his wife again?

He couldn't do it! If Helen during those years had wavered in the least in her loyalty to him, he would have had less compunction. But in the face of those years of silent, uncomplaining life with him, he couldn't now reappear to her and blast her new-found happiness and blacken her name.

Woodford laughed a little, bitterly. He was then to be an Enoch Arden from the tomb. A strange role, surely, yet it was the only one open to him.

What was he to do? He couldn't let Helen know now that he was alive, couldn't return to the home that had been his. Yet he must go somewhere. Where?

With a sudden leap of the heart he thought of Jack, his son. He could at least go to Jack, let his son know that he was living. Jack at least would be overjoyed to see him, and would keep the fact of his return secret from his mother.

John Woodford, with that thought rekindling a little his numbed feelings, started back through the trees toward the street. Where he had approached the house but minutes

before with eager steps, he stole away now like a thief fearful of being observed.

He reached the street and started across the blocks toward the cottage of his son. Few were abroad, for the cold seemed increasing and it was well past midnight. Woodford mechanically rubbed his stiffened hands as he hurried along.

He came to his son's neat little white cottage, and felt relief as he saw lights from its lower windows also. He had feared that no one would be up. He crossed the frozen lawn to the lighted windows, intent on seeing if Jack were there and if he were alone.

He peered in, as he had done at his own home. Jack was sitting at a little desk and his young wife was perched on the arm of his chair and was listening as he explained something to her from a sheet of writing on the desk.

John Woodford, pressing his face against the cold window-pane, could hear Jack's words.

'You see, Dorothy, we can just make it by adding our savings to Dad's insurance money,' Jack was saying.

'Oh, Jack!' cried Dorothy happily. 'And it's what you've wanted so long, a little business of your own!'

Jack nodded. 'It won't be very big to start with, but I'll make it grow, all right. This is the chance I've been hoping for and I'm sure going to make the most of it.

'Of course,' he said, his face sobering a little, 'it's too bad about Dad going like that. But seeing that he *did* die, the insurance money solves our problems of getting started. Now you take the overhead - ' he said, and began unreeling a string of figures to the intent Dorothy.

John Woodford drew slowly back from the window. He felt more dazed and bewildered than ever. He had forgotten the insurance he had carried, which he had intended to give Jack his start. But of course, he saw now, it had been paid over when he was believed dead.

He was not dead, but living. Yet if he let Jack know that, it meant the end of his son's long-desired opportunity. Jack would have to return the insurance money to the company, wrecking his dreamed-of chance. How could he let him know, then?

He, John Woodford, had already decided that he must remain dead to his wife and therefore to the world. He might as well remain so to his son, also. It was for the best. John Woodford melted away from the cottage into the darkness.

When he reached the street he stood in indecision. A freezing wind had begun to blow, and he felt very cold without an overcoat. Mechanically he turned his coat-collar closer around his neck.

He tried to think what he must do. Neither Helen nor Jack must know that he was living, and that meant that no one in the city must know. He must get out of the town to some other place, take up life under some other name.

But he would need help, money, to do that. Where was he to get them? Barred as he was from calling on his wife or son, to whom could he turn for help without letting his return become generally known?

Howard Norse! The name came at once to Woodford's lips. Norse had been his employer, head of the firm where Woodford had held a position for many years. Woodford had been one of his oldest employees. Howard Norse would help him to get a position somewhere else, and would keep his reappearance secret.

He knew where Norse's residence was, several miles out in the country. But he couldn't walk that far, and he had no taxi or trolley fare. He would have to telephone Norse.

Woodford walked back toward the city's central section, head bent against the piercing cold wind. He succeeded in finding an all-night lunchroom whose proprietor allowed him to use

the telephone. With cold-stiffened fingers he dialed Norse's number.

Howard Norse's sleepy voice soon came over the wire. 'Mr Norse, this is Woodford - John Woodford,' he said quickly.

There was an incredulous exclamation from Howard Norse. 'You're crazy! John Woodford's been dead and buried for a couple of weeks!'

'No, I tell you it's John Woodford!' insisted Woodford. 'I'm not dead at all, I'm as living as you are! If you'll come into town for me you'll see for yourself.'

'I'm not likely to drive to town at two in the morning to look at a maniac,' Norse replied acidly. 'Whatever your game is, you're wasting your time on me.'

'But you've got to help me!' Woodford cried. 'I've got to have money, a chance to get out of the city without anyone knowing. I gave your firm my services for years and now you've got to give me help!'

'Listen to me, whoever you are,' snapped Norse over the wire. 'I was bothered long enough with John Woodford when he was living - he was so inefficient we'd have kicked him out long ago if we hadn't been sorry for him. But now that he's dead, you needn't think you can bother me in his name. Good-night!'

The receiver clicked in Woodford's unbelieving ear.

He stared at the instrument. So *that* was what they had really thought of him at the firm - there where he had always thought himself one of the most highly valued of employees!

But there must be someone upon whom he could call for help; someone he could convince that John Woodford was still living; someone who would be glad to think that he might be living.

What about Willis Grann? Grann had been his closest friend next to Curtis Dawes. He had lent money more than

once to Woodford in the past, and certainly should be willing to do so now.

Hastily Woodford called Grann's number. This time he was more careful in his approach, when he heard the other's voice.

'Willis, I've got something to tell you that may sound incredible, but you've got to believe, do you hear?' he said.

'Who is this and what in the world are you talking about?' demanded Grann's startled voice.

'Willis, this is John Woodford. Do you hear, John Woodford! Everyone thinks I'm dead but I'm not, and I've got to see you.'

'What?' cried the other's voice over the telephone. 'Why, you must be drunk. I saw Woodford lying in his coffin myself, so I know he's dead.'

'I tell you, it's not so, I'm not dead!' Woodford almost screamed. 'I've got to get some money, though, to get away from here and you must lend it to me! You always lent it to me before, and I need it now worse than ever I did. I've got to get away!'

'So that's it!' said Willis Grann. 'Because I used to help Woodford out you think you can get money from me by just calling me up and pretending that you're he. Why, Woodford himself was the biggest pest in the world with his constant borrowings. I felt almost relieved when he died. And now you try to make me believe that he's come back from the dead to pester me again!'

'But he never died - I'm John Woodford really - ' Woodford protested vainly.

'Sorry, old top,' returned Grann's mocking voice. 'Next time pick a living person to impersonate, not a dead one.'

He hung up. John Woodford slowly replaced the receiver and made his way out to the street.

The wind was blowing harder and now was bringing with it clouds of fine snow that stung against his face like sand. He shivered as he stumbled along the streets of dark shops, his body freezing as his mind was frozen.

There was no one from whom he could get help, he saw. His paramount necessity was still to get out of the city, and to do that he must rely on himself.

The icy blasts of the snow-laden wind penetrated through his thin coat. His hands were shaking with the cold.

A sign caught Woodford's eye, the illuminated beacon of a relief lodging-house. At once he made his way toward it. He could at least sleep there tonight, get started from the city in the morning.

The shabby men dozing inside in chairs looked queerly at him as he entered. So did the young clerk to whom he made his way.

'I'd - I'd like to stay here tonight,' he said to the clerk.

The clerk stared. 'Are you trying to kid me?'

Woodford shook his head. 'No, I'm penniless and it's cold outside. I've got to stay somewhere.'

The clerk smiled disdainfully. 'Listen, fellow, no one with duds like yours is that hard up. Scram before I call a cop.'

Woodford looked down at his clothes, his frock coat and stiff white shirt and gleaming patent-leather shoes, and understood.

He said desperately to the clerk, 'But these clothes don't mean anything. I tell you, I haven't a penny!'

'Will you beat it before I have you thrown out of here?' the clerk demanded.

Woodford backed toward the door. He went outside again into the cold. The wind had increased and more snow was falling. The front of Woodford's coat was soon covered with it as he pushed along.

It came to him as a queer joke that the splendor of his funeral clothes should keep him from getting help now. He couldn't even beg a passer-by for a dime. Who would give to a panhandler in formal clothes?

Woodford felt his body quivering and his teeth chattering from sheer cold. If he could only get out of the blast of the icy wind! His eyes sought desperately along the street for a hallway where he might shelter himself.

He found a deep doorway and crouched down inside it, out of the wind and driving snow. But hardly had he done so when a heavy step paused in front of him and a nightstick rapped his feet smartly. An authoritative voice ordered him to get up and go home.

Woodford did not try to explain to the policeman that he was not a drunken citizen fallen by the way. He got wearily to his feet and moved on along the street, unable to see more than a few feet ahead for the whirl of snow.

The snow on which he was walking penetrated the thin shoes he wore, and his feet were soon even colder than the rest of his body. He walked with slow, dragging steps, head bent against the storm of white.

He was dully aware that the dark shops beside him had given way to a low stone wall. With a sudden start he recognized it as the wall of the cemetery which he had left but hours before, the cemetery from a vault in which he had escaped.

The vault! Why hadn't he thought of it before? he asked himself. The vault would be a shelter from the freezing wind and snow. He could stay there for the night without anyone objecting.

He paused, feeling for a moment a little renewal of his former terrors. Did he dare go back into that place from which he had struggled to escape? Then an extra-strong blast of icy air struck him and decided him – the vault would be

shelter and that was what his frozen body craved more than anything else.

Stiffly he climbed over the low stone wall and made his way through the cemetery's whitened monuments and vaults toward the one from which he had escaped. The driving snow covered his tracks almost as he made them, as he trudged toward the vault.

He reached it and tried its iron doors anxiously. Suppose he had locked them when he left! But to his relief they swung open, and he entered and shut them. It was dark inside, but he was out of the wind and snow now and his numbed body felt a little relief.

Woodford sat down in the corner of the vault. It was a shelter for the night, at least. It seemed rather ironic that he had had to come back here for shelter, but it was something to be thankful for that he had even this. In the morning, when the storm was over, he could leave without anyone seeing and get out of the city.

He sat listening to the wind and snow shriek outside. The stone floor of the vault was very cold, so cold that he felt his limbs stiffening and cramping, and finally he stood up unsteadily and paced to and fro in the vault, chafing his arms and hands.

If he had only a blanket, or even a heavy coat, to lie upon! He'd freeze there upon the stone floor. Then as he turned in his pacing he bumped into the coffin on the shelf and a new idea was born in his mind.

The coffin! Why, the interior of it was lined deep with silk and satin padding. It would be warm in the coffin. He could sleep in it far better than on the cold stone floor. But did he dare to re-enter it?

Again Woodford felt faintly the former terrors he had experienced when he had awakened in it. But they meant nothing, he told himself. He would not be fastened in, this

time, and his frozen flesh yearned for the warmth of the coffin's lining.

Slowly, carefully, he climbed up and lowered himself into the coffin and stretched out. The silk and padding he sank into had a grateful warmth. He lowered his head upon the soft little pillow with a sigh of relief. This was better.

He experienced an almost luxurious comfort now; but after he had lain for a little while he felt that the top of his body was still cold, where the cold air came into the open coffin's top. That cold air entering kept him from being completely warm. If the lid above him were just closed to keep out the cold air —

He reached up and got the edge of the heavy metal lid, then let it down upon himself. He was completely in the dark, now, inside the closed coffin. But he was warm, too, for the lid kept out the cold air. And he was getting warmer all the time, as his body warmed up the interior.

Yes, it was far more comfortable with the lid closed. An even warmth now pervaded his whole being, and the air inside the coffin was still getting warmer and thicker. He felt a little drowsy now, as he breathed that warm air, felt luxuriously sleepy as he lay on the soft silk.

It was getting a little harder to breathe, somehow, as the air became thicker. He ought really to raise the coffin lid and let in some fresh air. But it was so warm now, and the air outside was so cold, and he was more and more sleepy.

Something dim and receding in his fading consciousness told him that he was on the way to suffocation. But what if he was? was his sleepy thought. He was better off in here than back in the world outside. He had been a fool ever to fight so hard before to get out of his warm, comfortable coffin, to get back to that outside world.

No, it was better like this, the darkness and the warmth and the sleep that advanced. Nobody would ever know that he had awakened at all, that he had been away from here at

all. Everything would be just as before – just as before. And with that comforting assurance, John Woodford was swept farther and farther down the dark stream of unconsciousness from which this time there would be no returning.

Black Hound of Death

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A grim tale of stark horror – of the terrible disfigurement inflicted upon Adam Grimm by the dark priests of Inner Mongolia, and the frightful vengeance that pursued his enemy to the United States.

1. The Killer in the Dark

Egyptian darkness! The phrase is too vivid for complete comfort, suggesting not only blackness, but unseen things lurking in that blackness; things that skulk in the deep shadows and shun the light of day; slinking figures that prowl beyond the edge of normal life.

Some such thoughts flitted vaguely through my mind that night as I groped along the narrow trail that wound through the deep pinelands. Such thoughts are likely to keep company with any man who dares invade, in the night, that lonely stretch of densely timbered river-country which the black people call Egypt, for some obscurely racial reason.

There is no blackness this side of Hell's unlighted abyss as absolute as the blackness of the pine woods. The trail was but a half-guessed trace winding between walls of solid ebony. I followed it as much by the instincts of the piny woods dweller as by the guidance of the external senses. I went as

hurriedly as I dared, but stealth was mingled with my haste, and my ears were whetted to knife-edge alertness. This caution did not spring from the uncanny speculations roused by the darkness and silence. I had good, material reason to be wary. Ghosts might roam the pinelands with gaping, bloody throats and cannibalistic hunger as the Negroes maintained, but it was no ghost I feared. I listened for the snap of a twig under a great, splay foot, for any sound that would presage murder striking from the black shadows. The creature which, I feared, haunted Egypt was more to be dreaded than any gibbering phantom.

That morning the worst Negro desperado in that part of the state had broken from the clutches of the law, leaving a ghastly toll of dead behind him. Down along the river, bloodhounds were baying through the brush and hard-eyed men with rifles were beating up the thickets.

They were seeking him in the fastnesses near the scattered black settlements, knowing that a Negro seeks his own kind in his extremity. But I knew Tope Braxton better than they did; I knew he deviated from the general type of his race. He was unbelievably primitive, atavistic enough to plunge into uninhabited wilderness and live like a blood-mad gorilla in solitude that would have terrified and daunted a more normal member of his race.

So while the hunt flowed away in another direction, I rode toward Egypt, alone. But it was not altogether to look for Tope Braxton that I plunged into that isolated fastness. My mission was one of warning, rather than search. Deep in the mazy pine labyrinth, a white man and his servant lived alone, and it was the duty of any man to warn them that a red-handed killer might be skulking about their cabin.

I was foolish, perhaps, to be traveling on foot; but men who wear the name of Garfield are not in the habit of turning back on a task once attempted. When my horse unexpectedly went lame, I left him at one of the Negro cabins which fringe

the edge of Egypt, and went on afoot. Night overtook me on the path, and I intended remaining until morning with the man I was going to warn – Richard Brent. He was a taciturn recluse, suspicious and peculiar, but he could scarcely refuse to put me up for the night. He was a mysterious figure; why he chose to hide himself in a southern pine forest none knew. He had been living in an old cabin in the heart of Egypt for about six months.

Suddenly, as I forged through the darkness, my speculations regarding the mysterious recluse were cut short, wiped clear out of my mind. I stopped dead, the nerves tingling in the skin on the backs of my hands. A sudden shriek in the dark has that effect, and this scream was edged with agony and terror. It came from somewhere ahead of me. Breathless silence followed that cry, a silence in which the forest seemed to hold its breath and the darkness shut in more blackly still.

Again the scream was repeated, this time closer. Then I heard the pound of bare feet along the trail, and a form hurled itself at me out of the darkness.

My revolver was in my hand, and I instinctively thrust it out to fend the creature off. The only thing that kept me from pulling the trigger was the noise the object was making – gasping, sobbing noises of fear and pain. It was a man, and direly stricken. He blundered full into me, shrieked again, and fell sprawling, slobbering and yammering.

‘Oh, my God, save me! Oh, God have mercy on me!’

‘What the devil is it?’ I demanded, my hair stirring on my scalp at the poignant agony in the gibbering voice.

The wretch recognized my voice; he clawed at my knees.

‘Oh, Mas’ Kirby, don’ let him tetch me! He’s done killed my body, and now he wants my soul! It’s me – po’ Jim Tike. Don’ let him git me!’

I struck a match, and stood staring in amazement, while the match burned down to my fingers. A black man groveled

in the dust before me, his eyes rolling up whitely. I knew him well – one of the Negroes who lived in their tiny log cabins along the fringe of Egypt. He was spotted and splashed with blood, and I believed he was mortally wounded. Only abnormal energy rising from frenzied panic could have enabled him to run as far as he had. Blood jetted from torn veins and arteries in breast, shoulder and neck, and the wounds were ghastly to see, great ragged tears, that were never made by bullet or knife. One ear had been torn from his head, and hung loose, with a great piece of flesh from the angle of his jaw and neck, as if some gigantic beast had ripped it out with his fangs.

‘What in God’s name did this?’ I ejaculated as the match went out, and he became merely an indistinct blob in the darkness below me. ‘A bear?’ Even as I spoke I knew that no bear had been seen in Egypt for thirty years.

‘*He* done it!’ The thick, sobbing mumble welled up through the dark. ‘De white man dat come by my cabin and ask me to guide him to Mistuh Brent’s house. He said he had a tooth-ache, so he had his head bandaged; but de bandages slipped and I seen his face – he killed me for seein’ him.’

‘You mean he set dogs on you?’ I demanded, for his wounds were such as I have seen on animals worried by vicious hounds.

‘No, suh,’ whimpered the ebbing voice. ‘He done it hisself – aaaggghhh!’

The mumble broke in a shriek as he twisted his head, barely visible in the gloom, and stared back the way he had come. Death must have struck him in the midst of that scream, for it broke short at the highest note. He flopped convulsively once, like a dog hit by a truck, and then lay still.

I strained my eyes into the darkness, and made out a vague shape a few yards away in the trail. It was erect and tall as a man; it made no sound.

I opened my mouth to challenge the unknown visitant, but

no sound came. An indescribable chill flowed over me, freezing my tongue to my palate. It was fear, primitive and unreasoning, and even while I stood paralyzed I could not understand it, could not guess why that silent, motionless figure, sinister as it was, should rouse such instinctive dread.

Then suddenly the figure moved quickly toward me, and I found my voice, 'Who comes there?'

No answer; but the form came on in a rush, and as I groped for a match, it was almost upon me. I struck the match – with a ferocious snarl the figure hurled itself against me, the match was struck from my hand and extinguished, and I felt a sharp pain on the side of my neck. My gun exploded almost involuntarily and without aim, and its flash dazzled me, obscuring rather than revealing the tall man-like figure that struck at me; then with a crashing rush through the trees my assailant was gone, and I staggered alone on the forest trail.

Swearing angrily, I felt for another match. Blood was trickling down my shoulder, soaking through my shirt. When I struck the match and investigated, another chill swept down my spine. My shirt was torn and the flesh beneath slightly cut; the wound was little more than a scratch, but the thing that roused nameless fear in my mind was the fact that *the wound was similar to those on poor Jim Tike.*

2. 'Dead Men with Torn Throats!'

Jim Tike was dead, lying face down in a pool of his own blood, his red-dabbled limbs sprawling drunkenly. I stared uneasily at the surrounding forest that hid the thing that had killed him. That it was a man I knew; the outline, in the

brief light of the match, had been vague, but unmistakably human. But what sort of a weapon could make a wound like the merciless champing of great bestial teeth? I shook my head, recalling the ingenuity of mankind in the creation of implements of slaughter, and considered a more acute problem. Should I risk my life further by continuing upon my course, or should I return to the outer world and bring in men and dogs, to carry out poor Jim Tike's corpse, and hunt down his murderer?

I did not waste much time in indecision. I had set out to perform a task. If a murderous criminal besides Tope Braxton were abroad in the piny woods, there was all the more reason for warning the men in that lonely cabin. As for my own danger, I was already more than half-way to the cabin. It would scarcely be more dangerous to advance than to retreat. If I did turn back, and escape from Egypt alive, before I could rouse a posse, anything might happen in that isolated cabin under the black trees.

So I left Jim Tike's body there in the trail, and went on, gun in hand, and nerves sharpened by the new peril. That visitant had not been Tope Braxton. I had the dead man's word for it that the attacker was a mysterious white man; the glimpse I had had of the figure had confirmed the fact that he was not Tope Braxton. I would have known that squat, apish body even in the dark. This man was tall and spare, and the mere recollection of that gaunt figure made me shiver, unreasoningly.

It is no pleasant experience to walk along a black forest trail with only the stars glinting through the dense branches, and the knowledge that a ruthless murderer is lurking near, perhaps within arm's length in the concealing darkness. The recollection of the butchered black man burned vividly in my brain. Sweat beaded my face and hands, and I wheeled a score of times, glaring into the blackness where my ears had caught the rustle of leaves or the breaking of a twig – how

could I know whether the sounds were but the natural noises of the forest, or the stealthy movements of the killer?

Once I stopped, with an eerie crawling of my skin, as far away, through the black trees, I glimpsed a faint, lurid glow. It was not stationary; it moved, but it was too far away for me to make out the source. With my hair prickling unpleasantly I waited, for I knew not what; but presently the mysterious glow vanished, and so keyed up was I to unnatural happenings, that it was only then that I realized the light might well have been made by a man walking with a pine-knot torch. I hurried on, cursing myself for my fears, the more baffling because they were so nebulous. Peril was no stranger to me in that land of feud and violence where century-old hates still smoldered down the generations. Threat of bullet or knife openly or from ambush had never shaken my nerves before; but I knew now that I was afraid – afraid of something I could not understand, or explain.

I sighed with relief when I saw Richard Brent's light gleaming through the pines, but I did not relax my vigilance. Many a man, danger-dogged, has been struck down at the very threshold of safety. Knocking on the door, I stood sideways, peering into the shadows that ringed the tiny clearing and seemed to repel the faint light from the shuttered windows.

'Who's there?' came a deep harsh voice from within. 'Is that you, Ashley?'

'No; it's me – Kirby Garfield. Open the door.'

The upper half of the door swung inward, and Richard Brent's head and shoulders were framed in the opening. The light behind him left most of his face in shadow, but could not obscure the harsh gaunt lines of his features nor the gleam of the bleak gray eyes.

'What do you want, at this time of night?' he demanded, with his usual brusqueness.

I replied shortly, for I did not like the man; courtesy in our

part of the country is an obligation no gentleman thinks of shirking.

'I came to tell you that it's very likely that a dangerous Negro is prowling in your vicinity. Tope Braxton killed Constable Joe Sorley and a Negro trusty, and broke out of jail this morning. I think he took refuge in Egypt. I thought you ought to be warned.'

'Well, you've warned me,' he snapped, in his short-clipped eastern accent. 'Why don't you be off?'

'Because I have no intention of going back through those woods tonight,' I answered angrily. 'I came in here to warn you, not because of any love of you, but simply because you're a white man. The least you can do is to let me put up in your cabin until morning. All I ask is a pallet on the floor; you don't even have to feed me.'

That last was an insult I could not withhold, in my resentment; at least in the piny woods it is considered an insult. But Richard Brent ignored my thrust at his penuriousness and discourtesy. He scowled at me. I could not see his hands.

'Did you see Ashley anywhere along the trail?' he asked finally.

Ashley was his servant, a saturnine figure as taciturn as his master, who drove into the distant river village once a month for supplies.

'No; he might have been in town, and left after I did.'

'I guess I'll have to let you in,' he muttered, grudgingly.

'Well, hurry up,' I requested. 'I've got a gash in my shoulder I want to wash and dress. Tope Braxton isn't the only killer abroad tonight.'

At that he halted in his fumbling at the lower door, and his expression changed.

'What do you mean?'

'There's a dead nigger a mile or so up the trail. The man

who killed him tried to kill me. He may be after you, for all I know. The nigger he killed was guiding him here.'

Richard Brent started violently, and his face went livid.

'Who - what do you mean?' His voice cracked, unexpectedly falsetto. 'What man?'

'I don't know. A fellow who manages to rip his victims like a hound -'

'A hound!' The words burst out in a scream. The change in Brent was hideous. His eyes seemed starting from his head; his hair stood up stiffly on his scalp, and his skin was the hue of ashes. His lips drew back from his teeth in a grin of sheer terror.

He gagged and then found voice.

'Get out!' he choked. 'I see it, now! I know why you wanted to get into my house! You bloody devil! *He* sent you! You're his spy! *Go!*' The last was a scream and his hands rose above the lower half of the door at last. I stared into the gaping muzzles of a sawed-off shotgun. 'Go, before I kill you!'

I stepped back off the stoop, my skin crawling at the thought of a close-range blast from that murderous implement of destruction. The black muzzles and the livid, convulsed face behind them promised sudden demolition.

'You cursed fool!' I growled, courting disaster in my anger. 'Be careful with that thing. I'm going. I'd rather take a chance with a murderer than a madman.'

Brent made no reply; panting and shivering like a man smitten with ague, he crouched over his shotgun and watched me as I turned and strode across the clearing. Where the trees began I could have wheeled and shot him down without much danger, for my .45 would outrange his shortened scatter-gun. But I had come there to warn the fool, not to kill him.

The upper door slammed as I strode in under the trees, and the stream of light was cut abruptly off. I drew my gun

and plunged into the shadowy trail, my ears whetted again for sounds under the black branches.

My thoughts reverted to Richard Brent. It was surely no friend who had sought guidance to his cabin! The man's frantic fear had bordered on insanity. I wondered if it had been to escape this man that Brent had exiled himself in this lonely stretch of pinelands and river. Surely it had been to escape *something* that he had come; for he never concealed his hatred of the country nor his contempt for the native people, white and black. But I had never believed that he was a criminal, hiding from the law.

The light fell away behind me, vanished among the black trees. A curious, chill, sinking feeling obsessed me, as if the disappearance of that light, hostile as was its source, had severed the only link that connected this nightmarish adventure with the world of sanity and humanity. Grimly taking hold of my nerves, I strode on up the trail. But I had not gone far when again I halted.

This time it was the unmistakable sound of horses running; the rumble of wheels mingled with the pounding of hoofs. Who would be coming along that nighted trail in a rig but Ashley? But instantly I realized that the team was headed in the other direction. The sound receded rapidly, and soon became only a distant blur of noise.

I quickened my pace, much puzzled, and presently I heard hurried, stumbling footsteps ahead of me, and a quick, breathless panting that seemed indicative of panic. I distinguished the footsteps of two people, though I could see nothing in the intense darkness. At that point the branches interlaced over the trail, forming a black arch through which not even the stars gleamed.

'Ho, there!' I called cautiously. 'Who are you?'

Instantly the sounds ceased abruptly, and I could picture two shadowy figures standing tensely still, with bated breath.

'Who's there?' I repeated. 'Don't be afraid. It's me – Kirby Garfield.'

'Stand where you are!' came a hard voice I recognized as Ashley's. 'You sound like Garfield – but I want to be sure. If you move you'll get a slug through you.'

There was a scratching sound and a tiny flame leaped up. A human hand was etched in its glow, and behind it the square, hard face of Ashley peering in my direction. A pistol in his other hand caught the glint of the fire; and on that arm rested another hand – a slim, white hand, with a jewel sparkling on one finger. Dimly I made out the slender figure of a woman; her face was like a pale blossom in the gloom.

'Yes, it's you, all right,' Ashley grunted. 'What are you doing here?'

'I came to warn Brent about Tope Braxton,' I answered shortly; I do not relish being called on to account for my actions to anybody. 'You've heard about it, naturally. If I'd known you were in town, it would have saved me a trip. What are you-all doing on foot?'

'Our horses ran away a short distance back,' he answered. 'There was a dead Negro in the trail. But that's not what frightened the horses. When we got out to investigate, they snorted and wheeled and bolted with the rig. We had to come on on foot. It's been a pretty nasty experience. From the looks of the Negro I judge a pack of wolves killed him, and the scent frightened the horses. We've been expecting an attack any minute.'

'Wolves don't hunt in packs and drag down human beings in these woods. It was a man that killed Jim Tike.'

In the waning glow of the match Ashley stood staring at me in amazement, and then I saw the astonishment ebb from his countenance and horror grow there. Slowly his color ebbed, leaving his bronzed face as ashy as that of his master had been. The match went out, and we stood silent.

'Well,' I said impatiently, 'speak up, man! Who's the lady with you?'

'She's Mr Brent's niece.' The answer came tonelessly through dry lips.

'I am Gloria Brent!' she exclaimed in a voice whose cultured accent was not lost in the fear that caused it to tremble. 'Uncle Richard wired for me to come to him at once -'

'I've seen the wire,' Ashley muttered. 'You showed it to me. But I don't know how he sent it. He hasn't been to the village, to my knowledge, in months.'

'I came on from New York as fast as I could!' she exclaimed. 'I can't understand why the telegram was sent to me, instead of to somebody else in the family -'

'You were always your uncle's favorite, Miss,' said Ashley.

'Well, when I got off the boat at the village just before nightfall, I found Ashley, just getting ready to drive home. He was surprised to see me, but of course he brought me on out; and then - that - that dead man -'

She seemed considerably shaken by the experience. It was obvious that she had been raised in a very refined and sheltered atmosphere. If she had been born in the piny woods, as I was, the sight of a dead man, white or black, would not have been an uncommon phenomenon to her.

'The - the dead man -' she stammered, and then she was answered most hideously.

From the black woods beside the trail rose a shriek of blood-curdling laughter. Slavering, mouthing sounds followed it, so strange and garbled that at first I did not recognize them as human words. Their unhuman intonations sent a chill down my spine.

'Dead men!' the inhuman voice chanted. 'Dead men with torn throats! There will be dead men among the pines before dawn! Dead men! Fools, you are all dead!'

Ashley and I both fired in the direction of the voice, and

in the crashing reverberations of our shots the ghastly chant was drowned. But the weird laugh rang out again, deeper in the woods, and then silence closed down like a black fog, in which I heard the semi-hysterical gasping of the girl. She had released Ashley and was clinging frantically to me. I could feel the quivering of her lithe body against mine. Probably she had merely followed her feminine instinct to seek refuge with the strongest; the light of the match had shown her that I was a bigger man than Ashley.

'Hurry, for God's sake!' Ashley's voice sounded strangled. 'It can't be far to the cabin. Hurry! You'll come with us, Mr Garfield?'

'What was it?' the girl was panting. 'Oh, what *was* it?'

'A madman, I think,' I answered, tucking her trembling little hand under my left arm. But at the back of my mind was whispering the grisly realization that no madman ever had a voice like that. It sounded – God! – it sounded like some bestial creature speaking with human words, but not with a human tongue!

'Get on the other side of Miss Brent, Ashley,' I directed. 'Keep as far from the trees as you can. If anything moves on that side, shoot first and ask questions later. I'll do the same on this side. Now come on!'

He made no reply as he complied; his fright seemed deeper than that of the girl; his breath came in shuddering gasps. The trail seemed endless, the darkness abysmal. Fear stalked along the trail on either hand, and slunk grinning at our backs. My flesh crawled with the thought of a demoniacal clawed and fanged *thing* hurling itself upon my shoulders.

The girl's little feet scarcely touched the ground, as we almost carried her between us. Ashley was almost as tall as I, though not so heavy, and was strongly made.

Ahead of us a light glimmered between the trees at last, and a gusty sigh of relief burst from his lips. He increased his pace until we were almost running.

'The cabin at last, thank God!' he gasped, as we plunged out of the trees.

'Hail your employer, Ashley,' I grunted. 'He's driven me off with a gun once tonight. I don't want to be shot by the old - ' I stopped, remembering the girl.

'Mr Brent!' shouted Ashley. 'Mr Brent! Open the door quick! It's me - Ashley!'

Instantly light flooded from the door as the upper half was drawn back, and Brent peered out, shotgun in hand, blinking into the darkness.

'Hurry and get in!' Panic still thrummed in his voice. Then: 'Who's that standing beside you?' he shouted furiously.

'Mr Garfield and your niece, Miss Gloria.'

'Uncle Richard!' she cried, her voice catching in a sob. Pulling loose from us, she ran forward and threw her lithe body half over the lower door, throwing her arms around his neck. 'Uncle Richard, I'm so afraid! What does this all mean?'

He seemed thunderstruck.

'Gloria!' he repeated. 'What in heaven's name are you doing here?'

'Why, you sent for me!' She fumbled out a crumpled yellow telegraph form. 'See? You said for me to come at once!'

He went livid again.

'I never sent that, Gloria! Good God, why should I drag you into my particular hell? There's something devilish here. Come in - come in quickly!'

He jerked open the door and pulled her inside, never relinquishing the shotgun. He seemed to fumble in a daze. Ashley shouldered in after her, and exclaimed to me: 'Come in, Mr Garfield! Come in - come in!'

I had made no move to follow them. At the mention of my name, Brent, who seemed to have forgotten my presence, jerked loose from the girl with a choking cry and wheeled,

throwing up the shotgun. But this time I was ready for him. My nerves were too much on edge to let me submit to any more bullying. Before he could bring the gun into position, he was looking in the muzzle of my .45.

'Put it down, Brent,' I snapped. 'Drop it, before I break your arm. I'm fed up on your idiotic suspicions.'

He hesitated, glaring wildly, and behind him the girl shrank away. I suppose that in the full flood of the light from the doorway I was not a figure to inspire confidence in a young girl, with my frame which is built for strength and not looks, and my dark face, scarred by many a brutal river battle.

'He's our friend, Mr Brent,' interposed Ashley. 'He helped us, in the woods.'

'He's a devil!' raved Brent, clinging to his gun, though not trying to lift it. 'He came here to murder us! He lied when he said he came to warn us against a black man. What man would be fool enough to come into Egypt at night, just to warn a stranger? My God, has he got you both fooled? I tell you, *he wears the brand of the hound!*'

'Then you know *he's* here!' cried Ashley.

'Yes; this fiend told me, trying to worm his way into the house. God, Ashley, *he's* tracked us down, in spite of all our cleverness. We have trapped ourselves! In a city, we might buy protection; but here, in this accursed forest, who will hear our cries or come to our aid when the fiend closes in upon us? What fools – what fools we were to think to hide from *him* in this wilderness!'

'I heard him laugh,' shuddered Ashley. 'He taunted us from the bushes in his beast's voice. I saw the man he killed – ripped and mangled as if by the fangs of Satan himself. What – what are we to do?'

'What can we do except lock ourselves in and fight to the last?' shrieked Brent. His nerves were in frightful shape.

'Please tell me what it is all about?' pleaded the trembling girl.

With a terrible despairing laugh Brent threw out his arm, gesturing toward the black woods beyond the faint light. 'A devil in human form is lurking out there!' he exclaimed. 'He has tracked me across the world, and has cornered me at last? Do you remember Adam Grimm?'

'The man who went with you to Mongolia five years ago? But he died, you said. You came back without him.'

'I thought he was dead,' muttered Brent. 'Listen, I will tell you. Among the black mountains of Inner Mongolia, where no white man had ever penetrated, our expedition was attacked by fanatical devil-worshippers – the black monks of Erlik who dwell in the forgotten and accursed city of Yahlgan. Our guides and servants were killed, and all our stock driven off but one small camel.'

'Grimm and I stood them off all day firing from behind the rocks when they tried to rush us. That night we planned to make a break for it, on the camel that remained to us. But it was evident to me that the beast could not carry us both to safety. One man might have a chance. When darkness fell, I struck Grimm from behind with my gun butt, knocking him senseless. Then I mounted the camel and fled –'

He did not heed the look of sick amazement and abhorrence growing in the girl's lovely face. Her wide eyes were fixed on her uncle as if she were seeing the real man for the first time, and was stricken by what she saw. He plunged on, too obsessed and engulfed by fear to care or heed what she thought of him. The sight of a soul stripped of its conventional veneer and surface pretense is not always pleasant.

'I broke through the lines of the besiegers and escaped in the night. Grimm, naturally, fell into the hands of the devil-worshippers, and for years I supposed that he was dead. They had the reputation of slaying, by torture, every alien that they captured. Years passed, and I had almost forgotten the episode. Then, seven months ago, I learned that he was alive – was, indeed, back in America, thirsting for my life. The

monks had not killed him; through their damnable arts they had *altered* him. The man is no longer wholly human, but his whole soul is bent on my destruction. To appeal to the police would have been useless; he would have tricked them and wreaked his vengeance in spite of them. I fled from him up and down across the country for more than a month, like a hunted animal, and finally, when I thought I had thrown him off the track, I took refuge in this God-forsaken wilderness, among these barbarians, of whom that man Kirby Garfield is a typical example.'

'You can talk of barbarians!' she flamed, and her scorn would have cut the soul of any man who was not so totally engrossed in his own fears.

She turned to me. 'Mr Garfield, please come in. You must not try to traverse this forest at night, with that fiend at large.'

'No!' shrieked Brent. 'Get back from that door, you little fool! Ashley, hold your tongue. I tell you, he is one of Adam Grimm's creatures! He shall not set foot in this cabin!'

She looked at me, pale, helpless and forlorn, and I pitied her as I despised Richard Brent; she looked so small and bewildered.

'I wouldn't sleep in your cabin if all the wolves of hell were howling outside,' I snarled at Brent. 'I'm going, and if you shoot me in the back, I'll kill you before I die. I wouldn't have come back at all, but the young lady needed my protection. She needs it now, but it's your privilege to deny her that. Miss Brent,' I said, 'if you wish, I'll come back tomorrow with a buckboard and carry you to the village. You'd better go back to New York.'

'Ashley will take her to the village,' roared Brent. 'Damn you, *will* you go?'

With a sneer that brought the blood purpling his countenance, I turned squarely upon him and strode off. The door banged behind me, and I heard his falsetto voice

mingled with the tearful accents of his niece. Poor girl, it must have been like a nightmare to her: to have been snatched out of her sheltered urban life and dropped down in a country strange and primitive to her, among people whose ways seemed incredibly savage and violent, and into a bloody episode of wrong and menace and vengeance. The deep pinelands of the South-west seem strange and alien enough at any time to the average Eastern city-dweller; and added to their gloomy mystery and primordial wildness was this grim phantom out of an unsuspected past, like the figment of a nightmare.

I turned squarely about, stood motionless in the black trail, staring back at the pin-point of light which still winked through the trees. Peril hovered over the cabin in that tiny clearing, and it was no part of a white man to leave that girl with the protection of none but her half-lunatic uncle and his servant. Ashley looked like a fighter. But Brent was an unpredictable quantity. I believed he was tinged with madness. His insane rages and equally insane suspicions seemed to indicate as much. I had no sympathy for him. A man who would sacrifice his friend to save his own life deserves death.

But evidently Grimm was mad. His slaughter of Jim Tike suggested homicidal insanity. Poor Jim Tike had never wronged him. I would have killed Grimm for that murder, alone, if I had had the opportunity. And I did not intend that the girl should suffer for the sins of her uncle. If Brent had not sent that telegram, as he swore, then it looked much as if she had been summoned for a sinister purpose. Who but Grimm himself would have summoned her, to share the doom he planned for Richard Brent?

Turning, I strode back down the trail. If I could not enter the cabin, I could at least lurk in the shadows ready at hand if my help was needed. A few moments later I was under the fringe of trees that ringed the clearing.

Light still shone through the cracks in the shutters, and

at one place a portion of the window-pane was visible. And even as I looked, this pane was shattered, as if something had been hurled through it. Instantly the night was split by a sheet of flame that burst in a blinding flash out of the doors and windows and chimney of the cabin. For one infinitesimal instant I saw the cabin limned blackly against the tongues of flame that flashed from it. With the flash came the thought that the cabin had been blown up – but no sound accompanied the explosion.

Even while the blaze was still in my eyes, another explosion filled the universe with blinding sparks, and this one was accompanied by a thunderous reverberation. Consciousness was blotted out too suddenly for me to know that I had been struck on the head from behind, terrifically and without warning.

3. Black Hands

A flickering light was the first thing that impressed itself upon my awakening faculties. I blinked, shook my head, came suddenly fully awake. I was lying on my back in a small glade, walled by towering black trees which fitfully reflected the uncertain light that emanated from a torch stuck upright in the earth near me. My head throbbed, and blood clotted my scalp; my hands were fastened together before me by a pair of handcuffs. My clothes were torn and my skin scratched as if I had been dragged brutally through the brush.

A huge black shape squatted over me – a black man of medium height but of gigantic breadth and thickness, clad only in ragged, muddy breeches – Tope Braxton. He held a gun in each hand, and alternately aimed first one and then

the other at me, squinting along the barrel. One pistol was mine; the other had once belonged to the constable that Braxton had brained.

I lay silent for a moment, studying the play of the torch-light on the great black torso. His huge body gleamed shiny ebony or dull bronze as the light flickered. He was like a shape from the abyss whence mankind crawled ages ago. His primitive ferocity was reflected in the bulging knots of muscles that corded his long, massive apish arms, his huge sloping shoulders; above all the bullet-shaped head that jutted forward on a column-like neck. The wide, flat nostrils, murky eyes, thick lips that writhed back from tusk-like teeth – all proclaimed the man's kinship with the primordial.

'Where the devil do you fit into this nightmare?' I demanded.

He showed his teeth in an ape-like grin.

'I thought it was time you was comin' to, Kirby Garfield,' he grinned. 'I wanted you to come to 'fo' I kill you, so you know *who* kill you. Den I go back and watch Mistuh Grimm kill de ol' man and de gal.'

'What do you mean, you black devil?' I demanded harshly. 'Grimm? What do you know about Grimm?'

'I meet him in de deep woods, after he kill Jim Tike. I heah a gun fire and come with a torch to see who – thought maybe somebody after me. I meet Mistuh Grimm.'

'So you were the man I saw with the torch,' I grunted.

'Mistuh Grimm smaht man. He say if I help him kill some folks, he help me git away. He take and throw bomb into de cabin; dat bomb don't kill dem folks, just paralyze 'em. I watchin' de trail, and hit you when you come back. Dat man Ashley ain't plumb paralyze, so Mistuh Grimm, he take and bite out he throat like he done Jim Tike.'

'What do you mean, bite out his throat?' I demanded.

'Mistuh Grimm ain't a human bein'. He stan' up and walk like a man, but he part hound, or wolf.'

'You mean a werewolf?' I asked, my scalp prickling.

He grinned. 'Yeah, dat's it. Dey had 'em in de old country.' Then he changed his mood. 'I done talk long enough. Gwine blow yo' brains out now!'

His thick lips froze in a killer's mirthless grin as he squinted along the barrel of the pistol in his right hand. My whole body went tense, as I sought desperately for a loophole to save my life. My legs were not tied, but my hands were manacled, and a single movement would bring hot lead crashing through my brain. In my desperation I plumbed the depths of black folklore for a dim, all but forgotten superstition.

'These handcuffs belonged to Joe Sorley, didn't they?' I demanded.

'Uh huh,' he grinned, without ceasing to squint along the sights. 'I took 'em 'long with his gun after I beat his head in with window-bar. I thought I might need 'em.'

'Well,' I said, 'if you kill me while I'm wearing them, you're eternally damned! Don't you know that if you kill a man who's wearing a cross, his ghost will haunt you for ever after?'

He jerked the gun down suddenly, and his grin was replaced by a snarl.

'What you mean, white man?'

'Just what I say. There's a cross scratched on the inside of one of these cuffs. I've seen it a thousand times. Now go ahead and shoot, and I'll haunt you into hell.'

'Which cuff?' he snarled, lifting a gun-butt threateningly.

'Find out for yourself,' I sneered. 'Go ahead; why don't you shoot? I hope you've had plenty of sleep lately, because I'll see to it that you never sleep again. In the night, under the trees, you'll see my face leering at you. You'll hear my voice in the wind that moans through the cypress branches. When you close your eyes in the dark, you'll feel my fingers at your throat.'

'Shut up!' he roared, brandishing his pistols. His black skin was tinged with an ashy hue.

'Shut me up - if you dare!' I struggled up to a sitting position, and then fell back cursing. 'Damn you, my leg's broken!'

At that the ashy tinge faded from his ebony skin, and purpose rose in his reddish eyes.

'So yo' leg's busted!' He bared his glistening teeth in a beastly grin. 'Thought you fell mighty hard, and then I dragged you a right smart piece.'

Laying both pistols on the ground, well out of my reach, he rose and leaned over me, dragging a key out of his breeches pocket. His confidence was justified; for was I not unarmed, helpless with a broken leg? I did not need the manacles. Bending over me he turned the key in the old-fashioned handcuffs and tore them off. And like twin striking snakes my hands shot to his black throat, locked fiercely and dragged him down on top of me.

I had always wondered what would be the outcome of a battle between me and Tope Braxton. One can hardly go about picking fights with black men. But now a fierce joy surged in me, a grim gratification that the question of our relative prowess was to be settled once and for all, with life for the winner and death for the loser.

Even as I gripped him, Braxton realized that I had tricked him into freeing me - that I was no more crippled than he was. Instantly he exploded into a hurricane of ferocity that would have dismembered a lesser man than I. We rolled on the pine-needles, rending and tearing.

Were I penning an elegant romance, I should tell how I vanquished Tope Braxton by a combination of higher intelligence, boxing skill and deft science that defeated his brute strength. But I must stick to facts in this chronicle.

Intelligence played little part in that battle. It would have

helped me no more than it would help a man in the actual grip of a gorilla. As for artificial skill, Tope would have torn the average boxer or wrestler limb from limb. Man-developed science alone could not have withstood the blinding speed, tigerish ferocity and bone-crushing strength that lurked in Tope Braxton's terrible thews.

It was like fighting a wild beast, and I met him at his own game. I fought Tope Braxton as the rivermen fight, as savages fight, as bull apes fight. Breast to breast, muscle straining against muscle, iron fist crushing against hard skull, knee driven to groin, teeth slashing sinewy flesh, gouging, tearing, smashing. We both forgot the pistols on the ground; we must have rolled over them half a dozen times. Each of us was aware of only one desire, one blind crimson urge to kill with naked hands, to rend and tear and maul and trample until the other was a motionless mass of bloody flesh and splintered bone.

I do not know how long we fought; time faded into a blood-shot eternity. His fingers were like iron talons that tore the flesh and bruised the bone beneath. My head was swimming from its impacts against the hard ground, and from the pain in my side I knew at least one rib was broken. My whole body was a solid ache and burn of twisted joints and wrenched thews. My garments hung in ribbons, drenched by the blood that sluiced from an ear that had been ripped loose from my head. But if I was taking terrible punishment, I was dealing it too.

The torch had been knocked down and kicked aside, but it still smoldered fitfully, lending a lurid dim light to that primordial scene. Its light was not so red as the murder-lust that clouded my dimming eyes.

In a red haze I saw his white teeth gleaming in a grin of agonized effort, his eyes rolling whitely from a mask of blood. I had mauled his face out of all human resemblance; from eyes to waist his black hide was laced with crimson. Sweat

slimed us, and our fingers slipped as they gripped. Writhing half-free from his rending clutch, I drove every straining knot of muscle in my body behind my fist that smashed like a mallet against his jaw. There was a crack of bone, an involuntary groan; blood spurted and the broken jaw dropped down. A bloody froth covered the loose lips. Then for the first time those black, tearing fingers faltered; I felt the great body that strained against mine yield and sag. And with a wild-beast sob of gratified ferocity ebbing from my pulped lips, my fingers at last met in his throat.

Down on his back he went, with me on his breast. His failing hands clawed at my wrists, weakly and more weakly. And I strangled him, slowly, with no trick of jiu-jitsu or wrestling, but with sheer brute strength, bending his head back and back between its shoulders until the thick neck snapped like a rotten branch.

In that drunkenness of battle, I did not know when he died, did not know that it was death that had at last melted the iron thews of the body beneath me. Reeling up numbly, I dazedly stamped on his breast and head until the bones gave way under my heels, before I realized that Tope Braxton was dead.

Then I would have fallen and lapsed into insensibility, but for the dizzy realization that my work was not yet ended. Groping with numb hands I found the pistols, and reeled away through the pines, in the direction in which my forest-bred instinct told me the cabin of Richard Brent stood. With each step my tough recuperative powers asserted themselves.

Tope had not dragged me far. Following his jungle instincts, he had merely hauled me off the trail into the deeper woods. A few steps brought me to the trail, and I saw again the light of the cabin gleaming through the pines. Braxton had not been lying then, about the nature of that bomb. At least the soundless explosion had not destroyed the cabin, for it stood as I had seen it last, apparently undamaged. Light

poured, as before, from the shuttered windows, but from it came a high-pitched inhuman laughter that froze the blood in my veins. It was the same laughter that had mocked us beside the shadowed trail.

4. The Hound of Satan

Crouching in the shadows, I circled the little clearing to reach a side of the cabin which was without a window. In the thick darkness, with no gleam of light to reveal me, I glided out from the trees and approached the building. Near the wall I stumbled over something bulky and yielding, and almost went to my knees, my heart shooting into my throat with the fear of the noise betraying me. But the ghastly laughter still belled horribly from inside the cabin, mingled with the whimpering of a human voice.

It was Ashley I had stumbled over, or rather his body. He lay on his back, staring sightlessly upward, his head lolling back on the red ruin of his neck. His throat had been torn out; from chin to collar it was a great, gaping, ragged wound. His garments were slimy with blood.

Slightly sickened, in spite of my experience with violent deaths, I glided to the cabin wall and sought without success for a crevice between the logs. The laughter had ceased in the cabin and that frightful, inhuman voice was ringing out, making the nerves quiver in the backs of my hands. With the same difficulty that I had experienced before, I made out the words.

‘ – And so they did not kill me, the black monks of Erlik. They preferred a jest – a delicious jest, from their point of view. Merely to kill me would be too kind; they thought it more humorous to play with me awhile, as cats do with a mouse, and then send me back into the world with a mark

I could never erase – the brand of the hound. That's what they call it. And they did their job well, indeed. None knows better than they how to *alter* a man. Black magic? Bah! Those devils are the greatest scientists in the world. What little the Western world knows about science has leaked out in little trickles from those black mountains.

'Those devils could conquer the world, if they wanted to. They know things that no modern even dares to guess. They know more about plastic surgery, for instance, than all the scientists of the world put together. They understand glands, as no European or American understands them; they know how to retard or exercise them, so as to produce certain results – God, what results! Look at me! Look, damn you, and go mad!'

I glided about the cabin until I reached a window, and peered through a crack in the shutter.

Richard Brent lay on a divan in a room incongruously richly furnished for that primitive setting. He was bound hand and foot; his face was livid and scarcely human. In his starting eyes was the look of a man who has at last come face to face with ultimate horror. Across the room from him the girl, Gloria, was spread-eagled on a table, held helpless with cords on her wrists and ankles. She was stark naked, her clothing lying in scattered confusion on the floor as if they had been brutally ripped from her. Her head was twisted about as she stared in wide-eyed horror at the tall figure which dominated the scene.

He stood with his back toward the window where I crouched, as he faced Richard Brent. To all appearances this figure was human – the figure of a tall, spare man in dark, close-fitting garments, with a sort of cape hanging from his lean, wide shoulders. But at the sight a strange trembling took hold of me, and I recognized at last the dread I had felt since I first glimpsed that gaunt form on the shadowy

trail above the body of poor Jim Tike. There was something unnatural about the figure, something not apparent as he stood there with his back to me, yet an unmistakable suggestion of *abnormality*; and my feelings were the dread and loathing that normal men naturally feel toward the abnormal.

'They made me the horror I am today, and then drove me forth,' he was yammering in his horrible mouthing voice. 'But the *change* was not made in a day, or a month, or a year! They played with me, as devils play with a screaming soul on the white-hot grids of hell! Time and again I would have died, in spite of them, but I was upheld by the thought of vengeance! Through the long black years, shot red with torture and agony, I dreamed of the day when I would pay the debt I owed to you, Richard Brent, you spawn of Satan's vilest gutter!

'So at last the hunt began. When I reached New York I sent you a photograph of my – my face, and a letter detailing what had happened – and what *would* happen. You fool, did you think you could escape me? Do you think I would have warned you, if I were not sure of my prey? I wanted you to suffer with the knowledge of your doom; to live in terror, to flee and hide like a hunted wolf. You fled and I hunted you, from coast to coast. You did temporarily give me the slip when you came here, but it was inevitable that I should smell you out. When the black monks of Yahlgan gave me *this*' (his hand seemed to stab at his face, and Richard Brent cried out slobberingly), 'they also instilled in my nature something of the spirit of the beast they copied.

'To kill you was not enough. I wished to glut my vengeance to the last shuddering ounce. That is why I sent a telegram to your niece, the one person in the world that you cared for. My plans worked out perfectly – with one exception. The bandages I have worn ever since I left Yahlgan were displaced by a branch and I had to kill the fool who was guiding

me to your cabin. No man looks upon my face and lives, except Tope Braxton who is more like an ape than a man, anyway. I fell in with him shortly after I was fired at by the man Garfield, and I took him into my confidence, recognizing a valuable ally. He is too brutish to feel the same horror at my appearance that the other Negro felt. He thinks I am a demon of some sort, but so long as I am not hostile toward him, he sees no reason why he should not ally himself with me.

'It was fortunate I took him in, for it was he who struck down Garfield as he was returning. I would have already killed Garfield myself, but he was too strong, too handy with his gun. You might have learned a lesson from these people, Richard Brent. They live hardily and violently, and they are tough and dangerous as timber wolves. But you - you are soft and over-civilized. You will die far too easily. I wish you were as hard as Garfield was. I would like to keep you alive for days, to suffer.

'I gave Garfield a chance to get away, but the fool came back and had to be dealt with. That bomb I threw through the window would have had little effect upon him. It contained one of the chemical secrets I managed to learn in Mongolia, but it is effective only in relation to the bodily strength of the victim. It was enough to knock out a girl and a soft, pampered degenerate like you. But Ashley was able to stagger out of the cabin and would quickly have regained his full powers, if I had not come upon him and put him beyond power of harm.'

Brent lifted a moaning cry. There was no intelligence in his eyes, only a ghastly fear. Foam flew from his lips. He was mad - mad as the fearful being that posed and yammered in that room of horror. Only the girl, writhing pitifully on that ebony table, was sane. All else was madness and nightmare. And suddenly complete delirium overcame Adam

Grimm, and the laboring monotones shattered in a heart-stopping scream.

'First the girl!' shrieked Adam Grimm – or the thing that had been Adam Grimm. 'The girl – to be slain as I have seen women slain in Mongolia – to be skinned alive, slowly – oh, so slowly! She shall bleed to make you suffer, Richard Brent – suffer as I suffered in black Yahlgan! She shall not die until there is no longer an inch of skin on her body below her neck! Watch me flay your beloved niece, Richard Brent!'

I do not believe Richard Brent comprehended. He was beyond understanding anything. He yammered gibberish, tossing his head from side to side, spattering foam from his livid, working lips. I was lifting a revolver, but just then Adam Grimm whirled, and the sight of his face froze me into paralysis. What unguessed masters of nameless science dwell in the black towers of Yahlgan I dare not dream, but surely black sorcery from the pits of hell went into the remolding of that countenance.

Ears, forehead and eyes were those of an ordinary man; but the nose, mouth and jaws were such as men have not even imagined in nightmares. I find myself unable to find adequate descriptive phrases. They were hideously elongated, like the muzzle of an animal. There was no chin; upper and lower jaws jutted like the jaws of a hound or a wolf, and the teeth, bared by the snarling bestial lips, were gleaming fangs. How those jaws managed to frame human words I cannot guess.

But the change was deeper than superficial appearance. In his eyes, which blazed like coals of hell's fire, was a glare that never shone from any human's eyes, sane or mad. When the black devil-monks of Yahlgan altered Adam Grimm's face, they wrought a corresponding change in his soul. He was no longer a human being; he was a veritable werewolf, as terrible as any in medieval legend.

The thing that had been Adam Grimm rushed toward the

girl, a curved skinning-knife gleaming in his hand, and I shook myself out of my daze of horror, and fired through the hole in the shutter. My aim was unerring; I saw the cape jerk to the impact of the slug, and at the crash of the shot the monster staggered and the knife fell from his hand. Then; instantly, he whirled and dashed back across the room toward Richard Brent. With lightning comprehension he realized what had happened, knew he could take only one victim with him, and made his choice instantly.

I do not believe that I can logically be blamed for what happened. I might have smashed that shutter, leaped into the room and grappled with the thing that the monks of Inner Mongolia had made of Adam Grimm. But so swiftly did the monster move that Richard Brent would have died anyway before I could have burst into the room. I did what seemed the only obvious thing – I poured lead through the window into that loping horror as it crossed the room.

That should have halted it, should have crashed it down dead on the floor. But Adam Grimm plunged on, heedless of the slugs ripping into him. His vitality was more than human, more than bestial; there was something demoniac about him, invoked by the black arts that made him what he was. No natural creature could have crossed that room under that raking hail of close-range lead. At that distance I could not miss. He reeled at each impact, but he did not fall until I had smashed home the sixth bullet. Then he crawled on, beast-like, on hands and knees, froth and blood dripping from his grinning jaws. Panic swept me. Frantically I snatched the second gun and emptied it into that body that writhed painfully onward, spattering blood at every movement. But all hell could not keep Adam Grimm from his prey, and death itself shrank from the ghastly determination in that once-human soul.

With twelve bullets in him, literally shot to pieces, his brains oozing from a great hole in his temple, Adam Grimm

reached the man on the divan. The misshapen head dipped; a scream gurgled in Richard Brent's throat as the hideous jaws locked. For a mad instant those two frightful visages seemed to melt together, to my horrified sight – the mad human and the mad inhuman. Then with a wild-beast gesture, Grimm threw up his head, ripping out his enemy's jugular, and blood deluged both figures. Grimm lifted his head, with his dripping fangs and bloody muzzle, and his lips writhed back in a last peal of ghastly laughter that choked in a rush of blood, as he crumpled and lay still.

The Shuttered House

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

*Ghostly and uncanny was the influence of the old house
with the french shutters – a tale of shuddery fear*

Peter Jepson had made up his mind about it almost at first sight. The house was attractive, the dark green of shutters tightly closed over all its windows, and the vivid white of its brick walls lending an air of dubious enchantment to it. There was a wide piazza which could not be seen from the street because of the old red-brick garden wall; this Jepson could not help regarding as an asset, for he knew that Carlotta disliked being spied upon by curious villagers, and he himself did not care to be the focus of the certain attention which would fall to him once it was generally learned that he was a composer by profession.

Then, too, there was about the house a strangely silent air, broken only by vague chirps from the depths of the foliage, and suffused at this time of the year with the sweet, heavy odor of lilacs, a riot of lavender blossom at the foot of the garden. There were also a great many flowers growing wild in the lawn and amidst the garden's weeds, and the rambling trees and flowering shrubs seemed to have grown very well without care.

The agent spoke suddenly, breaking Jepson's scrutiny. 'Old Josiah Brendon built the house,' he said with the air of launching into a tale. 'A miser – died counting his gold, they say. His wife was just as bad in another way – hated everybody, never went out; for that matter, there are women like her in Sac Prairie today. But their son, Mark, and his wife, Elva, were the worst. No doubt about that. I used to know Mark, too; nice fellow. I never did understand what got into him. But no one knows exactly what makes a madman.'

'I remember when they took Elva away to the asylum, and when they brought her back for burial. I guess that was what finally upset Mark. Got him right. He lived here alone, then, and he used to come out at night and beat at the window-shutters and tear at the garden wall until his fingers bled. In the end, they had to take him away, too.'

He stopped musingly, pursing his lips and narrowing his eyes reflectively, and added, 'They brought him back alive, though – white-haired and looking terribly old. He didn't go back to this house – went to one of the hotels and took rooms there. Wouldn't go near this place. I saw him not long before he died last year and I got the agency.'

'Interesting,' commented Jepson shortly. 'And no one has lived here since?'

'Well, ah, yes,' murmured the agent apologetically. 'A crusty bachelor lived here for about a week. You could hardly call that occupying the house. He got queer notions.'

'Notions?' echoed Jepson absently.

Mr Burcher nodded vigorously. 'Had the idea there was someone trying to get into him. Never heard the like.' He paused, adding thoughtfully, 'I was glad to have him out of the house.'

Jepson eyed the french windows and the weed-grown garden and the high brick wall shutting out the street. He smiled to himself. 'Good,' he said. 'I'll take the house for the summer, at least.'

Burcher smiled enthusiastically. 'Will there be just you, Mr Jepson?' he asked.

'Oh, no. My invalid sister will move in with me,' Jepson replied. 'And of course, there'll be a cook, a maid, and a nurse for Carlotta.'

Together they went from the house.

Peter Jepson and his sister moved into the house on the first of June.

Miss Carlotta, an angular and unprepossessing woman who had spent a decade coddling her nerves, had at first been pleased with her brother's selection. However, he had not been so sanguine as to hope that she would long be content, though he had not thought she would complain so soon. After a day in the house, she pointed out that it felt rather damp. He brushed this suggestion firmly away.

'And then, too, Peter,' she went on, 'the air's funny in the house.'

This he chose to disregard entirely. He was at the moment deep in the score of Leo Sowerby's *Prairie*, and his enthusiasm for it had been rapidly mounting. 'This is a great work, Carlotta,' he said in an attempt to divert her mind from complaint. 'The critics can say all they want about the scarcity of really good Midwest composers, but I tell you that Sowerby - ' Happening to look up at this moment, he discovered his sister staring through the french windows of his study into the garden.

At the same moment she caught his glance, and without a flicker of her eyes, she whispered harshly, 'There's a strange man out there!'

Startled, he turned. The afternoon was cloudy with a hint of rain, and the garden, still in the motionless air of the sultry day, was heavily shadowed by the close-pressing clouds and the low-hanging trees. Near the lilac bushes at the far end there seemed indeed to be a figure, that of a rather bent man

of medium size, who was apparently engaged in work at the base of the wall. Jepson was about to comment, when the clouds broke, sunlight flooded the garden, and the figure was gone.

He was surprised. 'How strange!' he murmured presently. He had an unaccountable feeling of relief that the figure was gone. 'There's something that makes that shadow, Carlotta,' he said, turning to his sister.

Carlotta was still staring out at the wall.

'It's gone, my dear,' he said.

She opened her lips twice to speak, then breathlessly closed them again. Then she said quietly, 'No. It's still there. It's moved over about two yards, just behind the bush on the left. I can still see it. I - I don't think it's a shadow.'

The composer turned and looked toward the wall, but after a half-minute of careful scrutiny, he shook his head. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'There's nothing there.'

Since she continued to stare into the garden, he rose abruptly before her, cutting off her sight. 'Look here, Carlotta,' he said, his voice edged with sternness, 'you feed your imagination too much.'

For a moment her eyes seemed not to see him; then they came slowly back to focus. She smiled, and with a little nod, said, 'Perhaps so. But that shadow's still there.'

They stood challenging each other with their eyes for a few moments. Then abruptly she turned and went from the room, and after a momentary hesitation Jepson sat down again, looked fleetingly into the garden, and returned to the score he had been studying, thinking how very much smoother things would be if Carlotta could be persuaded to tire of being an invalid.

Four days passed, during which Jepson had noticed about his sister a vague uneasiness which disturbed him. It was unusual for Carlotta to betray even the slightest emotion. For a

moment he had hoped the life of an invalid had begun to pall, but he knew his sister too well to entertain any illusions on that score.

Carlotta suddenly unburdened her mind at luncheon one day, when, without unusual asperity, she cut her brother off as he began a discussion of his work.

'I think I'd like to live somewhere else,' she said abruptly.

'My dear!' he said firmly.

'I think it's the house,' continued Carlotta. 'It upsets me – it almost frightens me.'

He looked at her a moment as if he had not heard aright. Then he spoke. 'Nonsense. What you need, Carlotta, is some good fresh air, and exercise.'

'Well, I don't know,' she replied quickly. 'Maybe I do, but I don't think so. I'm fitted for a sedentary life, Peter, and I never before needed air and exercise. No, it's the house, I'm sure, and that's odd, come to think of it.'

'Very,' agreed Jepson drily. He grunted ungraciously and then, having finished his meal, excused himself and left his sister to stare earnestly at the crumbling, vine-grown bricks of the garden wall discernible through the trees.

But the memory of Carlotta's words bothered him, and to himself he was forced to admit that he had not slept as well as he might have. Carlotta had probably been affected the same way. He considered this, until finally he rose and began to walk about the old house, studying it as he went. There was nothing damp about it, he decided, remembering Carlotta's original complaint. It grew upon him as he went along that the atmosphere was rather uncannily close, but there was nothing unusual about that in a house which had been kept closed as long as this one had been. Despite the closeness of it, the atmosphere was pleasant and, after a few minutes, he returned to his work, chafing at the time he had lost on his sister's fancies.

On the following day Carlotta again insinuated her fancies into the conversation at table.

‘Well,’ said Jepson, resigned at last, ‘just what is it you feel?’

Carlotta looked at him unsteadily, her high forehead making her large brown eyes look larger. She leaned forward over the table and said softly, ‘I always have a horrible feeling that we’re not alone, that there are others here, others we can feel and sometimes see, like the other day in the garden. And they’re trying to get in – I can feel it, especially in the night.’

For a moment Jepson regarded her in amazement. ‘Others here – trying to get in?’ he repeated in astonishment. Then, ‘Carlotta, I think you’re ill.’

Carlotta shook her head; her voice rose. ‘I can feel them trying to get at us, I can feel them. I don’t know what they want, but I’m afraid, Peter, I’m really afraid. At night I wake up, and I’m in deadly terror – because I think someone has closed the shutters, and I’m shut in with them. And then I’ve a horror of that garden wall, ever since I saw the man there. I don’t want to stay here any longer, Peter. I don’t feel like myself any more. Sometimes I feel like another person. Yesterday I wanted to call you *Mark* – it was on the tip of my tongue, and I thought, how could you be *Mark*? You’re Peter; I never knew anyone named Mark. That’s why I want to go away.’

For a breathless instant Jepson’s astonishment held him speechless. Then, feeling the intensity of her voice and fearing for her sanity, he leaned over suddenly and began to pat her gently on her arm. ‘I’ll do what I can, my dear,’ he promised, restraining his amazement with difficulty.

‘That’s good,’ said Carlotta, and resumed her meal as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

He watched her narrowly for a short time; then he, too, gave his attention once more to the meal.

Carlotta, having finished presently, leaned back in her chair and said casually, 'By the way, Peter, I haven't heard you play Schumann's *Vogel als Prophet* for years as perfectly as you played it last night.'

Jepson looked up in open-mouthed surprise. He put his fork down next his plate.

'What?' he asked incredulously. 'What did you say?'

She looked at him in mild irritation. 'The *Vogel als Prophet*,' she repeated. 'You played it very well last night.'

'Last night,' he murmured hesitantly. 'Last night? But I didn't go near the piano after dinner yesterday,' he protested in a flustered voice. 'And I haven't played the *Vogel als Prophet* for months. You must have been dreaming, Carlotta.'

She considered him, vague alarm for him evident on her face. 'Oh, that's impossible, Peter. I was awake. I couldn't sleep. Why, I was even sitting up in bed. Oh, there's no doubt that I heard it – clear as could be. So you must have played it.'

'But I didn't,' he almost shouted. 'I went to bed shortly after you did last night. I didn't go near the piano.' He felt an unreasonable impulse to be furiously angry.

She raised her eyebrows and fixed him with startled eyes.

'But, Peter,' she said gently, 'I *know* I heard it. Then you must have played it in your sleep.'

'What nonsense!' he snapped. 'I am not and never have been a sleepwalker.'

She regarded him for a moment with a baffled expression on her face. Then presently, almost belligerently, she said, 'I suppose you'll tell me too that you weren't beating time or something in your room last night with metal rods. Don't start shaking your head – I heard it just as plainly as I heard the music – *clink, clink, clink* – until I thought I'd have a headache. And I'm sure I heard you counting once in a while, too. There's no mistake about it.'

'My God!' he murmured. It was all he could think of saying. And when she struck the table sharply with the flat of her hand and demanded to know what he had to say, he added meekly that very likely he *had* been sleepwalking. Seeing that this appeared to satisfy her, he left the table and went almost frantically to the telephone in his study, thanking whatever powers there were that Doctor Evans, the famous nerve specialist, had chosen to retire to Sac Prairie, his home town. He called the doctor and asked him to come as soon as possible to see Carlotta.

For the rest of the afternoon he was incapable of working under the stress of what he considered Carlotta's alarmingly violent hallucinations. He was troubled, too, by the persistently recurring memory of an uneasy dream he had had the previous night – a vague dream of four people about his bed, striving to touch him. He had got up that morning with the feeling of someone unknown close to him – a feeling as of someone trying to get at him, and now Carlotta's words had brought this feeling back to him. He remembered, too, the story of the bachelor tenant who had left the house saying that something had been trying to get *into him*.

Doctor Evans examined Carlotta that evening. When he came down the stairs after the examination, Jepson was waiting impatiently for him.

'Well, what do you make of her case?' he demanded.

'Very curious, very curious,' murmured the doctor cautiously. 'Certainly the house upsets her. Of course, it's a well-known fact that some places and often some people have disturbing effects on individuals, particularly nervous people like your sister. I could recount almost any number of similar cases.'

'In your opinion, then, the house has a bad effect on her?'

Doctor Evans hesitated. 'Bad? Well, it upsets her, as I said. I can't say it has an evil effect on her, but of course if this

becomes chronic, her nerves will naturally suffer. I feel that she believes there's someone in the building, a group of people, evidently, whom she appears to think imprisoned here and who are trying to get at her. That sounds dangerously like incipient paranoia. The shutters seem to give her that suggestion, but I understand from her nurse that they're never closed. As a matter of fact, two people went mad in this house – I suppose you know that.'

He stopped suddenly, an expression on his face as of some startling thought occurring to him.

'Mark Brendon and his wife,' he murmured. 'What an odd coincidence! I remember their persistent madness. It was dormant in the old folks, and came out in them – this feeling about the shutters. They were maddened by the obsession that the shutters and the garden wall were keeping them from the town. Singular coincidence, isn't it?'

'You surely don't think that there's some *influence* at work?' asked Jepson incredulously, raising his voice. Even as he asked the question, a sudden suspicion assailed him.

Doctor Evans shook his head. 'Oh, don't misunderstand me. I'm intimating nothing of the sort. Of course, there have been foolish rumors about the house, but they can be traced mostly to small boys, and I'm sure you know as well as I do that for the small town boy, a haunted house is almost a psychological necessity.'

'You're hedging, Doctor.'

'And you're jumping to conclusions, Mr Jepson,' said the doctor somewhat sharply. 'Your sister's extremely nervous – that's all. I do think the house affects her, and if I were you, I'd remove her at once, or she may develop phobias.'

For a moment Jepson faced the doctor, challenging him. But a host of troubled thoughts surged forward in his mind, and abruptly he asked. 'Tell me, Doctor, is there such a thing as psychic force?'

Doctor Evans looked uneasy and glanced hastily at his watch.

'Yes,' he said, somewhat reluctantly, 'there is. Don't ask me to explain the why of it – I can't. But there is such a thing, indeed, yes. Psychic residue, some people call it. Often left at the scene of violent deaths, accidents, or vivid emotional outbursts.'

'Like madness?'

'Like madness,' replied the doctor.

They looked at each other wordlessly, the doctor fidgeting with his hat.

'And can whatever forces leave psychic residue return to this place?' demanded Jepson. 'Can they come back – say, people who have died?'

'I don't know,' said the doctor. 'Are you expecting me to declare a belief in ghosts?'

Jepson ignored the question. 'Tell me,' he asked, with an odd intensity in his voice, 'which of the rooms in this house was Josiah Brendon's bedroom, and who used to have the room my sister is occupying now?'

The doctor, somewhat disconcerted, thought a bit. Presently he replied, 'Old Josiah's room is the one just above your study, and –'

'My bedroom,' interrupted Peter.

'And the room your sister has now used to be Elva Brendon's.'

'Ah,' said Jepson oddly. 'And money being counted might sound like somebody beating time with metal rods, mightn't it?'

Doctor Evans looked at him with a professional eye, his first reaction one of alarm for Jepson's sanity.

'Tell me, Doctor,' Jepson went on immediately, 'did you know Elva Brendon very well?'

'Oh, yes,' said the doctor expansively, and with some relief to find that Jepson's question was normal, coming as it did

after his apparently irrelevant comment about money being counted. 'A tall, handsome woman with silvery hair – what they call platinum blond now. But so sensitive!'

'Did she play the piano?' Jepson cut in.

'Very well, indeed.'

'And I suppose she had a favorite piece?' pressed Jepson, an impatient eagerness in his voice.

'Oh, yes, two or three of them,' replied the doctor. 'But her prime favorite was a lovely little thing by Schumann – let me see, it was – yes, *The Bird as Prophet*.'

Jepson drew a deep breath and half turned.

'Very well,' he said suddenly, 'I'll do as you suggest. Carlotta will be taken away; we'll both leave the house as soon as I can manage, the end of the week possibly. And thank you very much, Doctor. I shall expect your bill shortly.'

Doctor Evans took his departure with a side-eyed glance at Jepson, and the growing belief that sooner or later the composer would need medical attention.

Having seen the doctor to the door, Jepson went upstairs to his sister. He sat down in a low lounging-chair next her couch.

'My dear,' he asked abruptly, 'are you sure it was the Schumann *Vogel als Prophet* you heard the other night?'

'Quite,' said his sister firmly.

He pondered this. 'And the clinking noise you heard – that could have been someone counting coins, couldn't it?'

She considered the suggestion and presently nodded. 'Yes, it could,' she said.

'Very well,' he replied, smiling. 'I've decided to take another house, Carlotta. We'll move the end of this week.'

'Oh,' she said shortly. Then, 'What changed your mind so swiftly?'

'The doctor,' he answered. 'He thought the house might be unhealthy.'

She nodded contentedly. Then suddenly she looked queerly around the room. Leaning forward, she caught his sleeve and whispered harshly, 'Sooner, if we can. They're creeping closer – I can feel them trying to get in. The young one – she's the strongest.'

Jepson did not trust himself to reply. He smiled sickishly and slipped from the room.

He went to bed that night shortly after ten o'clock, his mind crowded with troubled thoughts. He went to sleep feeling uncannily that his sister's hallucinations had a basis in fact.

Presently his troubled mind succumbed to dreams. He saw himself in the house from somewhere beyond it. He was in the house and he could feel himself in the house, yet he seemed to be looking down from a height. He saw Carlotta, her nurse, the maid, the cook – and four others weaving through the shadows of the garden, four strange figures, an old man, and an old woman, and not far from them, a young man with a young woman standing a little ahead. In his dream he recognized them as he saw them – Josiah Brendon, the miser, and his wife, the misanthrope, Mark Brendon and his wife, Elva, whose hair shone silver against the limitless darkness of the dream.

They came drifting toward the house in a terrifying silence, motionless save for their intent movements. Presently he saw them in the house, the young woman in the lead, a fiercely feral expression on her face. She was like a huntress. They were on the stairs, she still in the lead, though she had paused for a moment at the piano; and now in the hall on the second floor. The old man drifted into the room where the detached Jepson lay asleep, and presently he was sitting on the floor counting out money. Elva went on into Carlotta's room, while Mark and his mother hung back in the hall.

Then there was a startlingly vivid scene – Elva advancing upon Carlotta, who lay asleep, unaware of the fiercely eager

eyes bearing down upon her. There was a sharp feeling of something trying to get in.

He came suddenly awake. The bedroom door had creaked open. He sat up in bed and moved to pull on the bed-lamp, but even as his hand rose, it was caught at the wrist, and before he could jerk it away, his sister's voice coming out of the darkness made it unnecessary.

'Good God, Carlotta, what are you doing?' he demanded.

'They're in the garden, they're in the garden, all four of them,' she replied in a hushed and agitated voice. 'They'll be coming in.'

He made as if to put on the light, but again she stopped him.

'They might see,' she warned. 'Go to the window and look. They're coming.'

He leapt from bed and went incautiously to the window. Then he drew sharply back into the shadow, away from the parallelogram of moonlight.

For there *were* people in the garden. Peter had a moment of anger at the invasion; then his anger froze into chilling alarm at the sudden recurrence of his dream. He stared intently down. There were four of them, just as Carlotta had said, just as he had dreamed. Four people coming slowly and intently down the path through the garden toward the house, a young woman in the lead, a young white-haired man following after, and at last an old man and an old woman. They were still-faced and pale in the moonlight, and their clothes were oddly black-green in the quiet light from above. They came stiffly on, their faces expressionless and cold, the young woman's lips slightly parted. They drifted past bushes and trees, momentarily lost in the deep shadows of overhanging limbs.

Then they came out into the clear moonlight before the french windows of his study below, and Jepson saw that the

four of them stood unshadowed in the clear cold light from the summer moon – four figures standing inconceivably without shadows in a patch of unbroken moonlight!

There could no longer be any doubt – the four were the same as those of his ghastly dream – the Brendons. They had come back to reclaim this house, to find if possible new openings for material life!

At that moment Carlotta came trembling to his side. 'Don't let them come in, don't let them come in. I'm afraid. It's the woman – the young woman – she's been here before, the night I heard you playing the piano. I didn't want to say anything – it was after that. She came to my room.'

'They can't come in,' he said drily, remembering, even as he said it, that he had left the french windows open against the warm summer night. 'I'll keep them out,' he added. Then he flung himself away from the window, out of the room, and down the stairs.

The french windows stood wide, unbroken moonlight flooding the floor, its reflected radiance holding the room in a silver dusk. He stood for a moment undecided; then he went forward and looked cautiously outside. There was nothing there. He backed apprehensively into the room, chill terror creeping possessively into him, and closed the french windows behind him.

Then he heard something from above: a *clink* – *clink* – *clink*, coming from his bedroom.

He whirled at a gentle breath of melody from the piano, but there was nothing there. Then he flung himself across the room and put on the light, leaning against the wall in the welcome glow that brought the room to life. After a minute, he looked carefully out into the hall and, seeing nothing, put on the light there, too.

He moved slowly toward the stairs, his eyes searching every darkened corner. Reaching the foot of the stairs, he turned to look around. He saw nothing.

Then abruptly he heard Carlotta's nurse scream.

He stood frozen while lights went up above, and in a moment the nurse herself appeared at the head of the stairs, her eyes wide with terror.

'Oh, Mr Jepson!' she cried, seeing him.

Her voice broke him from his fright. He mounted the stairs, only dimly hearing the nurse say, 'It's Miss Carlotta – something's wrong. She's talking very queerly. I can't seem able to do anything with her.'

'I'll go to her,' he said thickly.

In a moment he was standing outside his sister's room, her voice coming to him from within. Then he opened the door. He saw Carlotta on her knees at the window, looking out at the crumbling old garden wall.

He was nonplussed. 'Carlotta,' he said sharply, 'you'll take cold there. Go back to bed.'

'If you'll take them away,' she replied in a low, unnatural voice, not turning from the glass. 'Only take them away.'

Jepson strode forward and stood over her, alarmed, looking down at her white face.

'I can't even see over the wall any more, and the garden – it's only weeds, vile, ugly weeds. And those awful shutters everywhere. Oh, Mark, take them away from my window. Always closed before my eyes. Take them away!'

'*Carlotta!*' he exclaimed hoarsely.

'Take them away, Mark. I can't see anything. I can't see the town.' Her voice was a weary monotone, not recognizable to him.

He led her over and put her tenderly on her bed. 'Carlotta,' he murmured distractedly. He took hold of her hand and began to chafe it. He looked at her still face, and into eyes that did not see him. His hands were trembling.

'I could get better then, Mark – only take them away.'

He stood shuddering, the memory of his dream and its

meaning thrusting itself into his mind. Then suddenly he shouted loudly for the nurse and ran from the room to summon the doctor.

As he stood over the telephone, his eyes caught movement in the moonlit square before the french windows. There were three figures moving down the garden path – a young man, an old man, and an old woman. The young woman was gone – Elva was gone, back in her old room. And the harsh voice that screamed from above was no longer alone Carlotta's, but partly Elva's, a voice that rose in sheer, maddening terror.

'Take them away! Take – them – away!'

He had waited too long. There would always be shutters now for Carlotta. Like an automaton he lifted the telephone from its cradle and called the doctor.

Frozen Beauty

By SEABURY QUINN

A story of Jules de Grandin, and the weird exploit of a great Russian physician who was murdered before he could complete his daring experiment – a fascinating novelette of weird science.

The heat had been intolerable all day, but now a rain was falling, a soft and cooling summer rain that spread a gleaming black veneer across the highway pavement and marked the traffic lamps with cross-shaped fuzzy glows of green and ruby. Falling on our faces as we drove home from the club with the roadster's canvas cover folded back it was cool and gracious, delicate and calm upon our brows as the light touch of a skilful nurse's fingers on a fever-patient's forehead, soothing nerves stretched taut by eighteen holes of golf played in a blistering sun.

My friend Jules de Grandin's satisfaction with himself was most annoying. He had ceased playing at the second hole, found a wicker rocker on the clubhouse porch and devoted the entire afternoon to devastation of gin swizzles.

'*Tiens*,' he chuckled, 'you are droll, my friend, you English and Americans. You work like Turks and Tartars at your

professional vocations, then rest by doing manual labor in the sun. Not I, by blue; I have the self-respect!

He leant back on the cushions, turning up his forehead to the cooling rain and hummed a snatch of tune:

*'La vie est vaine,
Un peu d'amour -'*

With a strident screech of brakes I brought the roadster to a stop in time to keep from running down the man who stood before us in the headlights' glare, arm raised imperatively. 'Good heavens, man,' I rasped, 'd'ye want to be run over? You almost -'

'You're a doctor?' he demanded in a sharp, thin voice, pointing to the Medical Society's green cross and gold caduceus on my radiator.

'Yes, but -'

'Please come at once, sir. It's the master, Doctor Pavlovitch. I - I think he's very ill, sir.'

The ethics of the medical profession take no account of work-worn nerves, and with a sigh I headed toward the tall gate in the roadside hedge the fellow pointed out. 'What seems to be the matter with the doctor?' I inquired as our guide hopped nimbly on the running-board after swinging back the driveway gate.

'I - I don't know, sir,' he replied. 'Some kind o' stroke, I think. Th' telephone went out of order just at dinner-time - lightning musta hit th' line when th' storm was blowin' up - an' I took th' station wagon to th' village for some things th' grocer hadn't sent. When I got back everythink was dark an' I couldn't seem to make th' lights work, but they flashed on all sudden-like, an' there was Doctor Pavlovitch a-layin' in th' middle o' th' floor, with everythink all messed up in th' study, an' I couldn't seem to rouse him; so I tried to get th' village on th' phone, but it still won't work, and when I tried to start th' station wagon up I found that somethink

had gone wrong with it; so I starts to walk down to th' village, an' just then you come down th' road, an' I seen th' little green cross on your car, so —'

'I'll have that darn thing taken off tomorrow,' I assured myself; then, aloud, to stop the servant's endless chatter: 'All right, we'll do everything we can, but we haven't any medicines or instruments; so maybe we shall have to send you for supplies.'

'Yes, sir,' he replied respectfully, and to my relief lapsed into momentary silence.

The big house Doctor Michail Pavlovitch had purchased two years previously and in which he lived in churlish solitude, attended only by his English houseman, sat back on a deep lawn thick set with huge old trees, fenced against the highway by an eight-foot privet hedge and surrounded on the three remaining sides by tall brick walls topped with broken bottles set in mortar. As we circled up the driveway I could feel the eerie atmosphere that hovered round the place. It was, I think, the lights which struck me queerly, or, to be more accurate, the absence of familiar lights in a place we knew to be inhabited. Blinds were drawn down tightly, with forbidding secrecy, at every window; yet between their bottoms and the sills were little lines of luminance which showed against the darkness like a line of gray-white eyeball glimpsed between the lowered eyelids of a corpse.

We hurried down the wide hall to a big room at the rear and paused upon the threshold as the glare of half a dozen strong, unshaded lamps stabbed at our eyes. Everything about the place was topsy-turvy. Drawers had been jerked from desks and literally turned out upon the floor, their contents scattered in fantastic heaps as though they had been stirred with a gigantic spoon. The davenport was pulled apart, its mattress tipped insanely sidewise; pillows were ripped open and gaped like dying things, their gasping mouths disgorging

down and kapok. The whole room might have been a movie set at the conclusion of a slapstick farce, except for that which occupied the center of the floor.

In the midst of the fantastic jumble lay a man in dinner clothes, save for the jacket which, sleeves turned half out and linings slit to tatters, was crumpled on a chair. He lay upon his back, his partly-opened eyes fixed on the ceiling where a cluster of electric bulbs blazed white and hard as limelight. He was a big man with a big mustache curled in the fashion of the pre-war days, and what hair he had was touched with gray.

'Gawd, sir, he ain't moved since I left 'im!' the houseman whispered. 'Is 'e paralyzed, d'ye think?'

'Completely,' nodded Jules de Grandin. 'He is very dead, my friend.'

'Dead?'

'Like a herring, and unless I miss my guess, he died of murder.'

'But there's no blood, no sign of any wound,' I interrupted. 'I don't believe there was a struggle, even. The place has been ransacked, but -'

'No wound, you say, *mon vieux*?' he broke in as he knelt beside the dead man's head. '*Regardez, s'il vous plaît.*' He raised the massive, almost hairless head, and pointed with a well-groomed finger to a gleaming silver stud protruding from the flesh. Plunged in the rather beefy neck a tiny silver-headed bodkin showed. Less than half an inch of haft protruded, for the little awl was driven deep into that fatal spot, the medulla oblongata, with deadly accuracy. Death had been instantaneous and bloodless.

'How - ' I began, but he shut me off with an unpleasant laugh as he rose and brushed his knees.

'*Cherchez la femme*,' he murmured. 'This is undoubtedly a woman's work, and the work of one who knew him quite well. All the evidence suggests it. A little, tiny bodkin driven

into the brain; a woman's weapon. Probably she did it with her arms about his neck; a woman's finesse, that. Who she was and why she did it, and what she and her confederates looked for when they made a bears' den of this place is for the police to determine.'

Turning to the servant he demanded: 'This Doctor Pavlovitch, did he have callers in the afternoon?'

'No sir, not as I knows of. He was a queer 'un, sir, though he was a proper gentleman. Never had no callers I remember, never used th' telephone while I was here. If anybody ever come to see 'im they done it while I was away.'

'One sees. Did he ever mention fearing anyone, or suspecting that he might be robbed?'

'Him? Lor, sir, no! Six foot three in 'is stockin's, 'e was, an' could bend iron bars in 'is bare hands. I seen 'im do it more'n once. Had a regular harsenal o' guns an' things, too, 'e did, an' kept th' house locked like a jail. Didn't take no chances on a robbery, sir, but I wouldn't say he was afraid. He'd a been a nasty customer in a row; if anyone 'ad broken in he'd 'a give 'em what-for good an' proper, sir.'

'U'm?' Going to the telephone the little Frenchman raised the instrument from its forked cradle and held it to his ear. '*Parbleu!*' he pressed the contact bar down with a triple rattle, then dropped the speaking-tube back in its rack. 'Remain here, if you please,' he bade the servant as he motioned me to follow. Outside, he whispered: 'There is no dial tone discernible. The line is cut.'

We circled round the house seeking the connection, and beside a chimney found the inlet. The wires had been neatly clipped, and the fresh-cut copper showed as bright against the severed insulation as a wound against dark flesh.

'What d'ye make of it?' I asked as he knelt on the wet grass and searched the ground for traces of the wire-cutters. 'Think that chap inside knows more than he pretends?'

'Less, if possible,' he said shortly. 'Such stupidity as his could not be simulated. Besides, I know his type. Had he been implicated in a murder or a robbery he would have set as great a distance between him and the crime-scene as he could.' With a shrug of resignation he straightened to his feet and brushed the leaf-mold from his trousers. 'No tracks of any sort,' he murmured. 'The grass grows close against the house, and the rain has washed away what little tale the miscreants' footprints might have told. Let us go back. We must inform the police and the coroner.'

'Want me to take the car and notify 'em?' I asked as we turned the corner of the house. 'It's hardly safe to trust the servant out of sight before the officers have had a chance to question him, and you don't drive, so -'

The pressure of his fingers on my elbow silenced me, and we drew back in the shelter of the ivy-hung wall as the crunch of wheels came to us from the lower driveway.

'What the deuce?' I wondered as I glimpsed the vehicle between the rain-drenched trees. 'What's an express van doing here this time o' night?'

'Let us make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible,' he cautioned in a whisper. 'It may be that they plan a ruse for entering the house, and -'

'But good heavens, man, they've already gone through it like termites through a log,' I interjected.

'*Ah bah*, you overlook the patent possibilities, my friend. What do we really know? Only that Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered and his study ransacked. But why do people search a place? To find something they want, *n'est-ce-pas*? That much is obvious. Still, we do not know they found the thing they sought, or, if they found it, we cannot say that others do not also seek it. It must have been a thing of value to have caused them to do murder.'

'You mean there may be two gangs hunting something Pavlovitch had hidden in his house?'

'It is quite possible. He was a Russian, and Russia is synonymous with mystery today. The old noblesse have smuggled fortunes from the country, or have plans for getting out the treasures they could not take with them in flights; plots and counterplots, intrigue, plans for assassination or revenge are natural to a Russian as fleas are to a dog. I think it wholly possible that more than one conspiracy to deprive the amiable Pavlovitch of life and fortune has been in progress, and he would not have been a good insurance risk even if the ones who murdered him tonight had done their work less thoroughly.'

The big green truck had drawn up at the steps and a man in express uniform hopped out. 'Doctor Pavlovitch?' he asked when the houseman answered to his thunderous banging at the knocker.

'No-o, sir,' gulped the servant, 'the doctor isn't home just now -'

'Okay, pal. Will you sign for this consignment and give us a lift with it? It's marked urgent.'

With grunts and exclamations of exertion, plus a liberal allowance of the sort of language prized by soldiers, stevedores and sailors, the great packing-case was finally wrestled up the steps and dropped unceremoniously in the hall. The express van turned down the drive, and we slipped from our concealment to find Pavlovitch's houseman gazing at the giant parcel ruefully.

'What'll I do with it now, sir?' he asked de Grandin. 'I know th' doctor was expectin' somethink of th' sort, for he told me so hisself this mornin'; but 'e didn't tell me what it was, an' I don't know whether I should open it or leave it for th' officers.'

De Grandin tweaked an end of waxed mustache between his thumb and forefinger as he regarded the great crate. It was more than six feet long, something more than three feet wide, and better than a yard in height.

'*Eh bien,*' he answered, 'I think the citizens of Troy were faced with the same problem. They forbore to open that which came to them, with most deplorable results. Let us not be guilty of the same mistake. Have you a crowbar handy?'

Whoever put that case together had intended it to stand rough usage, for the two-inch planks that formed it were secured with mortises and water-swollen dowels, so though the three of us attacked it furiously it was upward of an hour ere we forced the first board loose; and that proved only the beginning, for so strongly were the shooks attached to one another that our task was more like breaking through a solid log than ripping a joined box apart. Finally the last plank of the lid came off and revealed a packing of thick felt.

'*Que diable?*' snapped de Grandin as he struck his crowbar on the heavy wadding. 'What is this?'

'What did you expect?' I queried as I mopped a handkerchief across my face.

'A man, perhaps a pair of them, by blue!' he answered. 'It would have made an ideal hiding-place. Equipped with inside fasteners, it could have been thrown open in the night, permitting those who occupied it to come forth and search the place at leisure.'

'Humph, there's certainly room for a man or two in there,' I nodded, prodding tentatively at the black felt wadding with my finger, 'but how would he get air – I say!'

'What is it?' he demanded. 'You have discovered something –'

'Feel this,' I interrupted, 'it seems to me it's –'

'*Parbleu*, but you have right!' he exclaimed as he laid his hand against the felt. 'It is cool, at least ten degrees cooler than the atmosphere. Let us hasten to unearth the secret of this *sacré* chest, my friends, but let us also work with caution. It may contain a charge of liquid air.'

'Liquid air?' I echoed as with the heavy shears the servant brought he started cutting at the layers of laminated felt.

'*Certainement*. Liquid air, my friend. Brought in sudden contact with warm atmosphere it would vaporize so quickly that the force of its expansion would be equal to a dynamite explosion. I have seen it –'

'But that's fantastic,' I objected. 'Who would choose such an elaborate –'

'Who would choose a woman's bodkin to dispatch the learned Doctor Pavlovitch?' he countered. 'It would have been much simpler to have shot him; yet – *morbleu*, what have we here?'

The final layer of felt had been laid back, and before us gleamed a chest of polished dark red wood, oblong in shape, with slightly rounded top with chamfered edges and a group of Chinese ideographs incised upon it. I had seen a case like that but once before, but I recognized it instantly. A friend of mine had died while traveling in Mongolia, and when they shipped his body home . . . 'Why, it's a Chinese coffin!' I exclaimed.

'*Précisément, un cercueil de bois chinois*, but what in Satan's name does it do here? And behold, observe, my friend; it, too, is cold.'

He was correct. The polished puncheon of Mongolian cedar was so cold that I could hardly bear to rest my hand upon it.

'I wonder what those characters stand for?' I mused. 'If we could read them they might give some clue –'

'I do not think so,' he replied. 'I can make them out; they are the customary *hong* for Chinese coffins, and mean *cheung sang* – long life.'

'"Long life!" – on a coffin lid?'

'But yes. *C'est drôle, ça*,' he agreed. 'It seems the heathen in his blindness has hopes of immortality, and does not decorate his tombs with skulls and cross-bones, or with pious,

gloomy verses in the Christian manner. However' – he raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug – 'we have still the puzzle of this so cold coffin to be solved. Let us be about it, but with caution.'

With more care than the average dentist shows when he explores a tooth, he bored a small hole in the cedar with an auger, pausing every now and then to test the temperature of the small bit against his hand. Some thirty seconds later he leaped back. 'I have struck nothingness; the bit is through – stand clear!' he cautioned, and a gentle hissing followed like an echo of his warning as a plume-like jet of feathery remex geysered upward from the coffin lid.

'Carbon dioxide snow!' we chorused; and:

'*Tiens*, it seems we shall not listen to the angels' songs immediately,' added Jules de Grandin with a laugh.

The casket followed usual Chinese patterns. Made from a single hollowed log with top and bottom joined by dowels, it was covered with successive coats of lacquer which made it seem an undivided whole, and it was not till we searched some time that we were able to discern the line between the lid and body. A series of small auger-holes was driven in the wood, and with these for starting-points we had begun the arduous task of prizing off the heavy lid when the sudden screech of brakes before the house gave warning of a new arrival.

'Take cover!' bade de Grandin, dropping down behind the massive coffin as he drew his pistol. 'If they think to carry us by storm we shall be ready for –'

'Michail – Michailovitch, has it come? Proudhon and Matrona are here; we must make haste! Where are you, man?' Rattling at the knob, kicking on the panels, someone clamored at the front door furiously, then, as we gave no sign, burst out in a torrent of entreaty phrased in words that seemed entirely consonants.

De Grandin left his ambush, tiptoed down the hall and shot the bolt back from the door, leaping quickly to one side and poising with bent knees, his pistol held in readiness. The heavy door swung inward with a bang and a young man almost fell across the sill.

'Michail,' he called hysterically, 'they're here; I saw them on the road today. Has it come, Michail – oh, my God!' – as he saw the coffin stripped of its enclosures standing in the glaring light from the hall chandelier – 'too late; too late!' He stumbled blindly a few steps, slumped down to his knees, then crept across the polished floor, dropping head and hands upon the coffin lid and sobbing broken-heartedly. 'Nikakova, *radost moya!*' he entreated. 'Oh, too late; too late!'

'*Tenez, Monsieur*, you seem in trouble,' de Grandin moved from his concealment and advanced a step, pistol lowered but eyes wary.

'Proudhon!' the stranger half rose from his knees and a look of utter loathing swept his face. 'You – ' His furious expression faded and gave way to one of wonder. 'You're not – who are you?' he stammered.

'*Eh bien*, my friend, I think that we might say the same to you,' de Grandin answered. 'It might be well if you explained yourself without delay. A murder has been done here and we seek the perpetrators –'

'A murder? Who –'

'Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered something like an hour ago; we are expecting the police –'

'Pavlovitch killed? It must be Proudhon was here, then,' the young man breathed. 'Was this coffin like this when you found it?'

'It was not. It came after Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered. We suspected it might be connected with the crime and were about to force it when you came howling at the door –'

'Quick, then! We must take it off before –'

'One moment, if you please, *Monsieur*. A murder has been

done and everyone about the place is suspect till he clears himself. This so mysterious parcel came while we were seeking clues, and neither it nor any other thing may be removed until the police –'

'We can't wait for the police! They wouldn't understand; they'd not believe; they'd wait until it is too late – oh, *Monsieur*, I don't know who you are, but I beg that you will help me. I must remove this coffin right away; get it to a safe place and have medical assistance, or –'

'I am Doctor Jules de Grandin and this is Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, both at your service if you can convince us that you have no criminal intent,' the little Frenchman said. 'Why must you rush away this casket which was brought here but a little while ago, and why should you desire to keep its presence hidden from the officers?'

A look of desperation crossed the other's face. He laid his forehead on the chilly coffin top again and burst into a fit of weeping. Finally: 'You are educated men, physicians, and may understand,' he murmured between sobs. 'You must believe me when I tell you that unless we take this coffin out at once a terrible calamity will follow!'

De Grandin eyed him speculatively. 'I will take the chance that what you say is true, *Monsieur*,' he answered. 'You have a motorcar outside? Good. Doctor Trowbridge will accompany you and guide you to our house. I shall stay and wait until the police have been notified and aid them with such information as I have. Then I shall rejoin you.'

Turning to the servant he commanded: 'Help us place this box upon the motor, if you please; then hasten to the nearest neighbor's and telephone the officers. I await you here.'

With the long box hidden in the tonneau of his touring-car the young man hugged my rear fender all the way to town, and was at my side and ready to assist in packing the unwieldy case into the house almost before I shut my motor off.

Once in the surgery, he crept furtively from one window to another, drawing down the blinds and listening intently, as though he were in mortal fear of spies.

'Well, now, young fellow,' I began as he completed his mysterious precautions, 'what's all this about? Let me warn you, if you've got a body hidden in that casket it's likely to go hard with you. I'm armed, and if you make a false move - ' Reaching in my jacket pocket I snapped my glasses-case to simulate - I hoped! - the clicking of a pistol being cocked, and frowned at him severely.

The smile of child-like confidence he gave me was completely reassuring. 'I've no wish to run away, sir,' he assured me. 'If it hadn't been for you they might have - Jesu-Mary, what is that?' He thrust himself before the red wood coffin as though to shield it with his body as a rattle sounded at the office door.

'*Salut, mes amis!*' de Grandin greeted as he strode into the surgery. 'I am fortunate. The *gendarmes* kept me but a little while, and I rode back to town with the mortician who brought in the doctor's body. You have not opened it? *Très bon*. I shall be delighted to assist you.'

'Yes, let us hurry, please,' our visitor begged. 'It has been so long - ' a sob choked in his throat, and he put his hand across his eyes.

The wood was heavy but not hard, and our tools cut through it easily. In fifteen minutes we had forced a length-wise girdle round the box, and bent to lift the lid.

'Nikakova!' breathed the young man as a worshipper might speak the name of some saint he adored.

'*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert!*' de Grandin swore.

'Good heavens!' I ejaculated.

A coat of hoarfrost fell away in flakes, and beneath it showed a glassy dome with little traceries of rime upon it. Between the lace-like meshes of the gelid veil we glimpsed a woman lying quiet as in sleep. There was a sort of wavering

radiance about her not entirely attributable to the icy envelope enclosing her. Rather, it seemed to me, she matched the brilliant beams of the electric light with some luminescence of her own. Nude she was as any Aphrodite sculptured by the master-craftsmen of the Isle of Melos; a cloven tide of pale-gold hair fell down each side her face and rippled over ivory shoulders, veiling the pink nipples of the full-blown, low-set bosoms and coursing down the beautifully shaped thighs until it reached the knees. The slender, shapely feet were crossed like those on medieval tombs whose tenants have in life made pilgrimage to Rome or Palestine; her elbows were bent sharply so her hands were joined together palm to palm between her breasts with fingertips against her chin. I could make out gold-flecked lashes lying in smooth arcs against her pallid cheeks, the faint shadows round her eyes, the wistful, half-pathetic droop of her small mouth. Oddly, I was conscious that this pallid, lovely figure typified in combination the austerity of sculptured saint, lush, provocative young womanhood and the innocent appeal of childhood budding into adolescence. Somehow, it seemed to me, she had lain down to die with a trustful resignation like that of Juliet when she drained the draft that sent her living to her family's mausoleum.

'Nikakova!' whispered our companion in a sort of breathless ecstasy, gazing at the quiet figure with a look of rapture.

'Hein?' de Grandin shook himself as though to free his senses from the meshes of a dream. 'What is this, *Monsieur*? A woman tombed in ice, a beautiful, dead woman -'

'She is not dead,' the other interrupted. 'She sleeps.'

'*Tiens*,' a look of pity glimmered in the little Frenchman's small blue eyes, 'I fear it is the sleep that knows no waking, *mon ami*.'

'No, no, I tell you,' almost screamed the young man, 'she's not dead! Pavlovitch assured me she could be revived. We were to begin work tonight, but they found him first, and -'

'*Halte la!*' de Grandin bade. 'This is the conversation of the madhouse, as meaningless as babies' babble. Who was this Doctor Pavlovitch, and who was this young woman? Who, by blue, are you, *Monsieur*?'

The young man paid no heed, but hastened around the coffin, feeling with familiar fingers for a series of small buttons which he pressed in quick succession. As the final little knob was pressed we heard a slowly rising, prolonged hiss, and half a dozen feathery jets of snowflakes seemed to issue from the icy dome above the body. The room grew cold and colder. In a moment we could see the vapor of our breaths before our mouths and noses, and I felt a chill run through me as an almost overwhelming urge to sneeze began to manifest itself.

'*Corbleu,*' de Grandin's teeth were chattering with the sudden chill, 'I shall take pneumonia; I shall contract coryza; I shall perish miserably if this continues!' He crossed the room and threw a window open, then leant across the sill, fairly soaking in the moist, warm summer air.

'Quick, shut the lights off!' cried our visitor. 'They must not see us!' He snapped the switch with frenzied fingers, then leaned against the door-jamb breathing heavily, like one who has escaped some deadly peril by the narrowest of margins.

As the outside air swept through the room and neutralized the chill, de Grandin turned again to the young man. '*Monsieur,*' he warned, 'my nose is short, but my patience is still shorter. I have had enough – too much, *parbleu!* Will you explain this business of the monkey now, or do I call the officers and tell them that you carry round the body of a woman, one whom you doubtless foully murdered, and –'

'No, no, not that!' the visitor besought. 'Please don't betray me. Listen, please; try to realize what I say is true.'

'My friend, you cannot put too great a strain on my credulity,' de Grandin answered. 'Me, I have traveled much, seen much, know much. The things which I know to be true

would make a less experienced man believe himself the victim of hallucinations. Say on, *mon vieux*; I listen.'

With steamer rugs draped around our shoulders we faced each other in the light of a small, shaded lamp. Our breath fanned out in vapory cumuli each time we spoke; before us gleamed the crystal-hooded coffin, like a great memento mori fashioned out of polar ice, and as it radiated ever-growing cold I caught myself involuntarily recalling a couplet from Bartholomew Dowling:

'And thus does the warmth of feeling
Turn chill in the coldness of death . . .'

Till then the rush of action had prevented any inventory of our visitor. Now as I studied him I found it difficult to fit him into any category furnished by a lifetime's medical experience. He was young, though not as young as he appeared, for pale-blond coloring and slenderness lent him a specious air of youth which was denied by drooping shoulders, trouble-lines about his mouth and deep-set, melancholy eyes. His chin was small and gentle, not actually receding, but soft and almost feminine in outline. The mouth, beneath a scarcely-visible ash-blond mustache, suggested extreme sensitiveness, and he held his lips compressed against each other as though the trait of self-suppression had become habitual. His brow was wider and more high than common, his blue eyes almost childishly ingenuous. When he spoke, it was with hesitancy and with a painfully correct pronunciation which betrayed as plainly as an accent that his English came from study rather than inheritance and use.

'I am Serge Aksakoff,' he told us in his flat, accentless voice. 'I met Nikakova Gapon when I was a student at the University of Petrograd and she a pupil at the Imperial Ballet Academy. Russia in 1916 was honeycombed with secret liberal societies, all loyal to the Little Father, but all intent

on securing something of democracy for a land which had lain prostrate underneath the iron heel of autocrats for twenty generations. Perhaps it was the thrill of danger which we shared; perhaps it was a stronger thing; at any rate we felt a mutual attraction at first meeting, and before the summer ended I was desperately in love with her and she returned my passion.

‘Our society numbered folk of every social stratum, workmen, artizans, artists and professional people, but mostly we were students ranging anywhere from twenty to sixteen years old. Two of our foremost members were Boris Proudhon and Matrona Rimsky. He was a tailor, she the mistress of Professor Michail Pavlovitch of the University of Petrograd, who as a physicist was equal to Soloviev in learning and surpassed him in his daring of experiment. Proudhon was always loudest in debate, always most insistent on aggressive action. If one of us prepared a plan for introducing social legislation in the Duma he scoffed at the idea and insisted on a show of force, often on assassination of officials whose duties were to carry out unpopular ukases. Matrona always seconded his violent proposals and insisted that we take direct and violent action. Finally, at their suggestion, we signed our names beneath theirs to a declaration of intention in which we stated that if peaceful measures failed we favored violence to gain our ends.

‘That night the officers of the Okhrana roused me from my bed and dragged me to the fortress of St Peter and St Paul. They locked me in a stinking, vermin-swarming cell and left me there three weeks. Then they led me out and told me that because I was but seventeen they had decided to extend me clemency; so instead of being hanged or sent to the Siberian mines with most of my companions I was merely to be exiled to Ekaterinburg for a term of sixty months. During that time I was to be subjected to continuous surveillance, to hold no communication with my family or friends in Russia, and not

engage in any occupation without express permission.'

'But you'd done nothing!' I protested. 'The paper that you signed declared specifically that you favored peaceful measures; you merely said that if these measures failed -'

Aksakoff smiled sadly. 'You didn't have to be a criminal to be exiled,' he explained. '“Political unreliability” was sufficient cause, and the officers of the political police were sole judges of the case. You see, administrative exile, as they called it, was technically not a punishment.'

'Oh, that's different,' I replied. 'If you were merely forced to live away from home -'

'And to make a journey longer than from New York to Los Angeles dressed in prison clothes and handcuffed to a condemned felon, shuffling in irons so heavy that it was impossible to lift your feet, to be fed infrequently, and then on offal that nothing but a half-starved dog - or man - would touch,' he interrupted bitterly. 'My only consolation was that Nikakova had been also granted “clemency” and accompanied me in exile.'

'The officer commanding our escort came from a family some of whom had also suffered exile, and this made him pity us. He allowed us to converse an hour a day, although this was prohibited, and several times he gave us food and tea from his own rations. It was from him we learned that Proudhon and Matrona were *agents provocateurs* of the political police, paid spies whose duty was not only to worm their way into the confidence of unsuspecting children such as we, but to incite us to unlawful acts so we might be arrested and deported.'

'Since I had no money and the Government did not care to fee me, I was graciously permitted to take service with a cobbler at Ekaterinburg, and Nikakova was allowed to do work for a seamstress. Presently I found a little cottage and she came to live with me.'

'It must have been some consolation to be married to the

girl you loved, even in such terrible conditions –' I began, but the cynicism of the look he gave me stopped my well-meant comment.

'I said she came to live with me,' he repeated. '“Politicos” were not permitted marriage without special dispensation from the police, and this we could not get. We had no money to pay bribes. But whatever church and state might say, we were as truly man and wife as if we'd stood before the altar of St Isaac's and been married by the Patriarch. We pledged our love for time and all eternity kneeling on the floor of our mean cabin with a blessed ikon for our witness, and because we had no rings to give each other I took two nails and beat them into circlets. Look –'

He thrust his hand out, displaying a thin band of flattened wire on the second shaft of the third finger.

'She had one, too,' he added, beckoning us to look upon the body in the frost-domed coffin. Through the envelope of shrouding ice we saw the dull gleam of the narrow iron ring upon one of the shapely folded hands.

'In that northern latitude the twilight lasts till after ten o'clock, and my labors with the cobbler started with the sunrise and did not end till dark,' Aksakoff continued as he resumed his seat and lit the cigarette de Grandin proffered. 'There is an English saying that shoemakers' children go unshod. It was almost literally true in my case, for the tiny wage I earned made it utterly impossible for me to purchase leather shoes, and so I wound rags round my feet and ankles. Nika-kova had a pair of shoes, but wore them only out of doors. As for stockings, we hadn't owned a pair between us since the first month of our exile.

'One evening as I shuffled home in my rag boots I heard a groan come from the shadows, and when I went to look I found an old man fallen by the way. He was pitifully thin and ragged, and his matted, unkempt beard was almost stiff

with filth and slime. We who lived in utter poverty could recognize starvation when we saw it, and it needed but a single glance to see the man was famishing. He was taller by a head than I, but I had no trouble lifting him, for he weighed scarcely ninety pounds, and when I put my arm round him to steady him it was as if I held a rag-clothed skeleton.

'Nikakova helped me get his ragged clothing off and wash away the clotted filth and vermin; then we laid him on a pile of straw, for we had no bedsteads, and fed him milk and brandy with a spoon. At first we thought him too far gone for rescue, but after we had worked with him an hour or so his eyes came open and he murmured, 'Thank you, *Gaspadin* Aksakoff.'

' "*Gaspadin!*" It was the first time I had heard that title of respect since the night the police dragged me from my bed almost a year before, and I burst out crying when the old man mumbled it. Then we fell to wondering. Who was this old rack of bones, clothed in stinking rags, filthy as a mujik and verminous as a mangy dog, who knew my name and addressed me with a courteous title? Exiles learn to suspect every change of light and shadow, and Nikakova and I spent a night of terror, starting at each footstep in the alley, almost fainting every time a creak came at our lockless door for fear it might be officers of the *gendarmerie* come to take us for affording shelter to a fugitive.

'The starving stranger rallied in the night and by morning had sufficient strength to tell us he was Doctor Pavlovitch, seized by the Okhrana as a politically dangerous person and exiled for five years to Ekaterinburg. Less fortunate than we, he had been unable to obtain employment even as a manual laborer when the Government, preoccupied with war and threat of revolution, had turned him out to live or starve as fate decreed. For months he'd wandered through the streets like a stray animal, begging kopeks here and there, fighting

ownerless dogs and cats for salvage from swill-barrels; finally he dropped exhausted in his tracks within a hundred yards of our poor cabin.

'We had hardly food enough for two, and often less than the equivalent of a dime a week in cash, but somehow we contrived to keep our guest alive through the next winter, and when spring came he found work upon a farm.

'The forces of revolt had passed to stronger hands than ours, and while we starved at Ekaterinburg Tsar Nicholas came there as an exile, too. But though the Bolsheviki ruled instead of Nicholas it only meant a change of masters for the three of us. Petrograd and all of Russia was in the hands of revolutionists so busy with their massacres and vengeance that they had no time or inclination to release us from our exile, and even if we had been freed we had no place to go. With the coming of the second revolution everything was communized; the Red Guards took whatever they desired with no thought of payment; tradesmen closed their shops and peasants planted just enough to keep themselves. We had been poor before; now we were destitute. Sometimes we had but one crust of black bread to share among us, often not even that. For a week we lived on Nikakova's shoes, cutting them in little strips and boiling them for hours to make broth.

'The Bolsheviks shot Nicholas and his family on July 17, and eight days later Kolchak and the Czechs moved into Ekaterinburg. Pavlovitch was recognized and retained to assist in the investigation of the murder of the royal family, and we acted as his secretaries. When the White Guards moved back toward Mongolia we went with them. Pavlovitch set up a laboratory and hospital at Tisingol, and Nikakova and I acted as assistants. We were very happy there.'

'One rejoices in your happiness, *Monsieur*,' de Grandin murmured when the young man's silence lengthened, 'but how was it that Madame Aksakoff was frozen in this never quite sufficiently to be reprobated coffin?'

Our visitor started from his revery. 'There was fighting everywhere,' he answered. 'Town after town changed hands as Red and White Guards moved like chessmen on the Mongol plains, but we seemed safe enough at Tisingol till Nikakova fell a victim to taiga fever. She hovered between life and death for weeks, and was still too weak to walk, or even stand, when word came that the Red horde was advancing and destroying everything before it. If we stayed our dooms were sealed; to attempt to move her meant sure death for Nikakova.'

'I told you Pavlovitch was one of Russia's foremost scientists. In his work at Tisingol he had forestalled discoveries made at great universities of the outside world. The Leningrad physicians' formula for keeping blood ionized and fluid, that it might be in readiness for instant use when transfusions were required, was an everyday occurrence at the Tisingol infirmary, and Carrell's experiment of keeping life in chicken hearts after they were taken from the fowls had been surpassed by him. His greatest scientific feat, however, was to take a small warm-blooded animal – a little cat or dog – drug it with an opiate, then freeze it solid with carbonic oxide snow, keep it in refrigeration for a month or two, then, after gently thawing it, release it, apparently no worse for its experience.'

"There is hope for Nikakova," he told me when the news came that the Bolsheviks were but two days away. "If you will let me treat her as I do my pets, she can be moved ten thousand miles in safety, and revived at any time we wish."

'I would not consent, but Nikakova did. "If Doctor Pavlovitch succeeds we shall be together once again," she told me, "but if we stay here we must surely die. If I do not live through the ordeal – *nichevo*, I am so near death already that the step is but a little one, and thou shalt live, my Serge. Let us try this one chance of escape."

'Pavlovitch secured a great Mongolian coffin and we set

about our work. Nikakova was too weak to take me in her arms, but we kissed each other on the mouth before she drank ten drops of laudanum which sent her into a deep sleep within half an hour. The freezing process had to be immediate, so that animation would come to a halt at once; otherwise her little strength would be depleted by contending with the chill and she would really die, and not just halt her vital processes. We stripped her bedrobe off and set her hands in prayer and crossed her feet as though she came back from a pious pilgrimage, then sealed her lips with flexible collodion and stopped her nasal orifices; then, before she had a chance to suffocate, we laid her on a sheet stretched on carbonic oxide snow, spread another sheet above her and covered her with a sheet-copper dome into which we forced compressed carbonic oxide. The temperature inside her prison was so low her body stiffened with a spasm, every drop of blood and moisture in her system almost instantly congealing. Then we laid her in a shallow bath of distilled water which we froze as hard as steel with dry ice, and left her there while we prepared the coffin which was to be her home until we reached a place of safety.

‘Pavlovitch had made the coffin ready, putting tanks of liquefied carbonic oxide underneath the space reserved for the ice plinth and arranging vents so that the gas escaping from the liquid’s slow evaporation might circulate continuously about the icy tomb in which my darling lay. Around the ice block we set a hollow form of ice to catch and hold escaping gases, then wrapped the whole in layer on layer of *yurta*, or tent-felt, and put it in the coffin, which we sealed with several coats of Chinese lacquer. Thus my loved one lay as still as any sculptured saint, sealed in a tomb of ice as cold as those *zaberegas*, or ice mountains, that form along the banks of rivers in Siberia when the mercury goes down to eighty marks below the zero line.

'We trekked across the Shamo desert till we came to Dolo Nor, then started down the Huang Ho, but just north of Chiangchun a band of Chahar bandits raided us. Me they carried off to hold for ransom, and it was three days before I made them understand I was a penniless White Russian for whom no one cared a kopek. They would have killed me out of hand had not an English prisoner offered them five pounds in ransom for me. Six months later I arrived at Shanghai with nothing but the rags I stood in.

'White Russians have no status in the East, but this was helpful to me, for jobs no other foreigner would touch were offered me. I was in turn a ricksha boy, a German secret agent, a runner for a gambling-house, an opium smuggler and gun runner. At every turn my fortunes mounted. In ten years I was rich, the owner of concessions in Kalgan, Tientsin and Peiping, not much respected, but much catered to. *Maskee*' – he raised his shoulders in a shrug – 'I'd have traded everything I owned for that red coffin that had vanished when the Chahars captured me.

'Then at last I heard of Pavlovitch. He had been made the surgeon of the bandit party which co-operated with the one that captured me, and when they were incorporated in the Chinese army had become a colonel. When he saved a war lord's life by transfusion of canned blood they presented him with half a city's loot. Shortly afterward he emigrated to America. The coffin? When the Chahars first saw it they assumed that it was filled with treasure and were about to smash it open, but its unnatural coldness frightened them, and they buried it beneath the ice near Bouir Nor and scuttled off pellmell in mortal fear of the ten thousand devils which Pavlovitch assured them were confined in it.

'It cost me two years and a fortune to locate Nikakova's burial-place, but finally we found it, and so deeply had they buried her beneath the *zaberega*'s never-melting ice that we had to blast to get my darling out. We wrapped the coffin

in ten folds of tent-felt wet with ice-and-salt solution, and took it overland to Tientsin, where I put it in a ship's refrigeration chamber and brought it to America. Yesterday I reached this city with it, having brought it here in a refrigeration car, and all arrangements had been made for Pavlovitch to revive Nikakova when – this afternoon I saw Proudhon and the Rimsky woman driving down the road toward Pavlovitch's house and knew that we must hasten.'

'*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, but why should seeing your confrères of Russian days impress you with this need for desperate haste?' de Grandin asked.

Aksakoff smiled bleakly. 'Do you remember what befell the people who investigated the assassination of the Tsar?' he answered. 'The assassins covered up their bloody work completely, so they thought; burned the bodies in a bonfire and threw the ashes down the shaft of an abandoned mine, but patient research under Sokoloff made all precautions useless. It was Pavlovitch whose work unearthed the evidence of crime. From the ashes in the old Isetsky mine he sifted little bits of evidence, the Emperor's Maltese cross, six sets of steels from women's corsets, a mixed assortment of charred buttons, buckles, parts of slippers, hooks and eyes, and a number of small dirty pebbles which, when cleaned and treated chemically, turned out to be pure diamonds. It was this evidence which proved the Bolsheviki's guilt – after they bare-facedly denied all implication in the regicide, and all who helped to prove their guilt were marked for "excution" – even those who occupied the posts of clerks have been run down and murdered by their secret agents. There is no doubt Proudhon and the woman who was Pavlovitch's mistress – and whose betrayal caused his exile in the Tsarist days – were sent here to assassinate him. It was unquestionably that female Judas who killed Pavlovitch, and after he was dead she and Proudhon rummaged through his papers. Their task is not only to stop oral testimony of their Government's

guilt, but to destroy incriminating documents, as well.'

'One sees. And it is highly probable they found messages from you to him, advising him of your arrival. *Tiens*, I think that you were well advised to take this coffin from the house of death without delay.'

'But in killing Pavlovitch they killed my darling, too!' sobbed Aksakoff. 'The technique of his work was secret. No one else can bring beloved Nikakova from her trance - '

'I would not say as much,' denied the little Frenchman. 'I am Jules de Grandin, and a devilish clever fellow. Let us see what we shall see, my friend.'

'It is the most fantastic thing I ever heard!' I told him as we went to bed. 'There's no doubt the freezing process has preserved her wonderfully, but to hope to bring her back to life - that's utterly absurd. When a person dies, he's dead, and I'd stake my reputation that's nothing but a lovely corpse in there,' I nodded toward the bathroom where the plinth of ice stood in the tub and Aksakoff stretched on a pallet by the bolted door, a pistol ready in his hand.

De Grandin pursed his lips, then turned an impish grin on me. 'You have logic and the background of experience to support your claims,' he nodded, 'but as Monsieur Shakespeare says, heaven and earth contain things our philosophy has not yet dreamed of. As for logic, *eh bien*, what is it? A reasoning from collated data, from known facts, *n'est-ce-pas*? But certainly. Logically, therefore, wireless telegraphy was scientifically impossible before Marconi. Radio communication was logically an absurd dream till invention of the vacuum tube made former scientific logic asinine. Yet the principles that underlay these things were known to physicists for years; they simply had not been assembled in their proper order. Let us view this case:

'Take, by example, hibernating animals, the tortoise of our northern climates, the frog, the snake; every autumn they

put by their animation as a housewife folds up summer clothes for winter storage. They appear to die, yet in the spring they sally forth as active as they were before. One not versed in natural lore might come upon them in their state of hibernation and say as you just said, "This is a corpse." His experience would tell him so, yet he would be in error. Or take the fish who freezes in the ice. When spring dissolves his icy prison he swims off in search of food as hungrily as if he had not paused a moment in his quest. The toad encrusted in a block of slate, such as we see unearthed in coal mines now and then, may have been "dead" *le bon Dieu* only knows how many centuries; yet once release him from encasement and he hops away in search of bugs to fill his little belly. Again -'

'But these are all cold-blooded creatures,' I protested. 'Mammals can't suspend the vital process -'

'Not even bears?' he interrupted with mock-mildness. 'Or those Indians who when hypnotized fall into such deep trances that accredited physicians do not hesitate to call them dead, and are thereafter buried for so long a time that crops of grain are sown and harvested above them, then, disinterred, are reawakened at the hypnotist's command?'

'Humph,' I answered, nettled. 'I've never seen such things.'

'*Précisément*. I have. I do not know how they can be. I only know they are. When things exist we know that they are so, whether logic favors them or not.'

'Then you think that this preposterous tale is true; that we can thaw this woman out and awaken her, after she's lain dead and tombed in ice for almost twenty years?'

'I did not say so -'

'Why, you did, too!'

'It was you, not I, who called her dead. Somatically she may be dead - clinically dead, in that her heart and lungs and brain have ceased to function, but that is not true death.

You yourself have seen such cases revived, even when somatic death has lasted an appreciable time. She was not diseased when animation was suspended, and her body has been insulated from deteriorative changes. I think it possible the vital spark still slumbers dormant and can be revived to flame if we have care – and luck.'

The bathroom vigil lasted five full days and nights. There seemed a steel-like quality to the icy catafalque that defied summer heat and gently-dripping water from the shower alike, as if the ice had stored up extra chill in the long years it lay locked in the frost-bound earth of Outer Mongolia, and several times I saw it freeze the water they dropped on it instead of yielding to the liquid's higher temperature. At last the casing melted off and they laid the stiff, marmoreal body in the tub, then ran a stream of water from the faucet. For ten hours this was cool, and the gelid body showed no signs of yielding to it. Time after time we felt the stone-hard arms and hands, the legs and feet that seemed for ever locked in algid *rigor mortis*, the little flower-like breasts that showed no promise of waking from their frigid unresponsiveness. Indeed, far from responding to the water's thermal action, the frozen body seemed to chill its bath, and we noticed little thread-like lines of ice take form upon the skin, standing stiffly out like oversized mold-spores and overlaying the white form with a coat of jewel-bright, quill-like pelage.

'*Excellent, parfait, splendide; magnifique!*' de Grandin nodded in delight as the ice-fur coat took form. 'The chill is coming forth; we are progressing splendidly.'

When the tiny icicles cleared away, they raised the water's temperature a little, gradually blending it from tepid to blood-warm, and fifteen hours of immersion in the warmer bath brought noticeable results. The skin became resilient to the touch, the flesh was firm but flexible, the folded hands relaxed and slipped down to the sides, slim ankles loosed

their interlocking grip and the feet lay side by side.

'Behold them, if you please, my friend,' de Grandin whispered tensely. 'Her feet, see how they hold themselves!'

'Well?' I responded. 'What - '

'*Ah bah*, has it been so long then since your student days that you do not remember the flaccidity of death? Think of the cadavers which you worked upon - were their feet like those ones yonder? By blue, they were not! They were pro-lapsed, they hung down on the ankles like extensions of the leg, for their flexor muscles had gone soft and inelastic. These feet stand out at obtuse angles to the legs.'

'Well - '

'*Précisément; tu parles, mon ami*. It is very well, I think. It may not be a sign of life, but certainly it negatives the flaccidness of death.'

Periodically they pressed the thorax and abdomen, feeling for the hardness of deep-seated frozen organs. At length, 'I think we can proceed, my friends,' de Grandin told us, and we lifted the limp body from the bath and dried it hurriedly with warm, soft towels. De Grandin drew the plugs of cotton from the nostrils and wiped the lips with ether to dissolve the seal of flexible collodion, and this done he and Aksakoff began to rub the skin with heated olive oil, kneading with firm gentleness, massaging downward toward the hands and feet, bending arms and legs, wrists, neck and ankles. Somehow, the process repulsed me. I had seen a similar technique used by embalmers when they broke up *rigor mortis*, and the certitude of death seemed emphasized by everything they did.

'Now, *Dei gratia*, we shall succeed!' the Frenchman whispered as he turned the body on its face and knelt over it, applying his hands to the costal margins, bearing down with all his might. There was a gentle, sighing sound, as of breath slowly exhaled, and Aksakoff went pale as death.

'She lives!' he whispered. 'O Nikakova, *lubimui moi, radost moya* - '

I felt a sob of sympathy rise in my throat. Too often I had heard that vital simulation when air was forced between a corpse's lips by sudden pressure. No physician of experience, no morgue attendant, no embalmer can be fooled by that . . .

'*Mordieu*, I think . . . I think - ' de Grandin's soft, excited whisper sounded from the bed. He had leant back, releasing pressure on the corpse, and as he did so I was startled to observe a swelling of the lower thorax. Of course it could be nothing but mechanical reaction, the natural tendency of air to rush into an emptied space, I told myself, but . . .

He bent forward swiftly, pushing down upon the body with both hands, retained the pressure for a moment, then swung back again. Forward - back; forward - back, twenty times a minute by the swiftly-clicking second hand of his wrist watch he went through the movements of the Schaefer method of forced respiration, patiently, methodically, almost mechanically.

I shook my head despairingly. This hopeless labor, this unfounded optimism . . .

'Quick, quick, my friend, the suprarenalin!' he gasped. 'Put fifteen minims in the syringe, and hurry, if you please. I can feel a little, so small stirring here, but we must perform a cardiocentesis!'

I hastened to the surgery to prepare the suprarenal extract, hopeless as I knew the task to be. No miracle of medicine could revive a woman dead and buried almost twenty years. I had not spent a lifetime as a doctor to no purpose; death was death, and this was death if I had ever seen it.

De Grandin poised the trocar's point against the pallid flesh beneath the swell of the left breast, and I saw the pale skin dimple, as though it winced instinctively. He thrust with swift, relentless pressure, and I marveled at the skill which guided the pointed, hollow needle straight into the heart, yet missed the tangled maze of vein and artery.

Aksakoff was on his knees, hands clasped, eyes closed, prayers in strangled Russian gushing from his livid lips. De Grandin pressed the plunger home, shooting the astringent mixture deep into a heart which had not felt warm blood in half a generation.

A quick, spasmodic shudder shook the pallid body and I could have sworn I saw the lowered eyelids flutter.

The Frenchman gazed intently in the calm, immobile face a moment; then: '*Non?*' he whispered tensely. '*Pardieu*, I say you shall! I will it!'

Snatching up a length of sterile gauze he folded it across her lightly parted lips, drew a deep breath and laid his mouth to hers. I saw his temple-veins stand out as he drained his lungs of air, raised his head to gasp more breath, then bent and breathed again straight in the corpse's mouth. Tears stood in his eyes, his cheeks seemed losing every trace of color, he was becoming cyanotic. 'Stop it, de Grandin!' I exclaimed. 'It's no use, man, you're simply -'

'*Triomphe, victoire; succès!*' he gasped exultantly. 'She breathes, she lives, my friends; we have vanquished twenty years of death. *Embrasse-moi!*' Before I realized what he was about he had thrown both arms around me and planted a resounding kiss on both cheeks, then served the Russian in like manner.

'Nikakova - Nikakova, *radost moyá* - joy of life!' sobbed Aksakoff. The almost-golden lashes fluttered for an instant; then a pair of gray-green eyes looked vaguely toward the sobbing man, unfocussed, unperceiving, like the eyes of new-born infants struggling with the mystery of light.

It was impossible, absurd and utterly preposterous. Such a thing could not have happened, but . . . there it was. In the upper chamber of my house I had seen a woman called back from the grave. Sealed in a tomb of ice for almost twenty years, this woman lived and breathed and looked at me!

*

Physically she mended rapidly. We increased her diet of albumins, milk and brandy to light broth and well-cooked porridges in two days. She was able to take solid food within a week; but for all this she was but an infant magnified in size. Her eyes were utterly unfocussed, she seemed unable to do more than tell the difference of light and shade, when we spoke to her she gave no answer; the only sounds she made were little whimpering noises, not cries of pain or fear, but merely the mechanical responses of vocal cords reacting to the breath. Two nurses were installed and de Grandin scarcely left her side, but as the time drew out and it became increasingly apparent that the patient whom he nursed was nothing but a living organism without volition or intelligence, the lines about his eyes appeared more deeply etched each day.

A month went by without improvement; then one day he came fairly bouncing into the study. 'Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, come and see, but step softly, I implore you!' he commanded, clutching at my elbow and dragging me upstairs. At the bedroom door he paused and nodded, smiling broadly, like a showman who invites attention to a spectacle. Aksakoff knelt by the bed, and from the piled-up pillows Nikakova looked at him, but there was nothing infantile about her gaze.

'Nikakova, *radost moya* – joy of life!' he whispered, and:

'Serge, my love, my soul, my life!' came her murmured answer. Her pale hands lay like small white flowers in his clasp, and when he leant to her, her kisses flecked his cheeks, his brow, his eyelids like lightly fluttering butterflies.

'*Tiens*,' de Grandin murmured, 'our Snow Queen has awakened, it seems; the frosts of burial have melted, and – come away, my friend; this is not for us to see!'

He tweaked my sleeve to urge me down the hall. The lovers' mouths were joined in a fierce, passionate embrace,

and the little Frenchman turned away his eyes as though to look on them were profanation.

Nikakova seemed intent on catching up the thread of interrupted life, and she and Serge with de Grandin spent long hours shopping, going to the theatre, visiting museums and art galleries or merely taking in the myriad scenes of city life. The semi-nudity of modern styles at first appalled her, but she soon revised her pre-war viewpoint and took to the unstockinged, corsetless existence of the day as if she had been born when Verdun and the Argonne were but memories, instead of in the reign of Nicholas the Last. When she finally had her flowing pale-gold hair cut short and permanently waved in little tight-laid poodle curls she might have passed as twin to any of a million of the current crop of high school seniors. She had an oddly incomplete *modé* of expression, almost devoid of pronouns and thickly strewn with participles, a shy but briar-sharp sense of humor, and an almost infinite capacity for sweets.

'No, recalling nothing,' she assured us when we questioned her about her long interment. 'Drinking laudanum and saying good-bye to my Serge. Then sleep. Awakening finds Serge beside me. Nothing more – a sleep, a waking. Wondering could death – true death – be that way? To fall asleep and wake in heaven?'

As soon as Nikakova's strength returned they were to go to China where Serge's business needed personal direction, for now he had recovered his beloved the matter of accumulating wealth had reassumed importance in his eyes. 'We suffered poverty together; now we shall share the joy of riches, *radost moya*,' he declared.

De Grandin had gone to the county medical society, where his fund of technical experience and his Rabelaisian wit made him an always welcome guest. Nikakova, Aksakoff and

I were in the drawing-room, the curtains drawn against the howling storm outside, a light fire crackling on the hearth. She had been singing for us, sad, nostalgic songs of her orphaned homeland; now she sat at the piano, ivory hands flitting fitfully across the ivory keys as she improvised, pausing every now and then to nibble at a peppermint, then, with the spicy morsel still upon her tongue, to take a sip of coffee. I watched her musingly. Serge looked his adoration. She bore little semblance to the pale corpse in its ice-bound coffin, this gloriously happy girl who sat swaying to the rhythm of her music in the glow of the piano lamp. She wore a gown of striped silk that flashed from green to orange and from gold to crimson as she moved. It was negligible as to bodice, but very full and long of skirt. Brilliants glittered on her cross-strapped sandals, long pendants of white jade swayed from her ears.

In the trees outside, the wind rose to a wail, and a flock of gulls which flew storm-driven from the bay skirled like lost souls as they wheeled overhead. A mile away a Lackawanna locomotive hooted long and mournfully as it approached a crossing. Nikakova whirled up from her seat on the piano bench and crossed the room with the quick, feline stride of the trained dancer, her full skirt swirling round her feet, the firelight gleaming on her jewel-set sandals and on brightly lacquered toenails.

'Feeling devils,' she announced as she dropped upon the hearth rug and crouched before the fire, chin resting in her palms, her fingers pressed against her temples. 'Seeming to hear *zagovór* – 'ow you call heem? – weetches' spell-charm? On nights like this the weetches and the wairwolves riding – dead men coming up from graves; ghosts from dead past flocking back –'

She straightened to her knees and took a matchbox from the tabouret, bent a match stave till it formed an L turned upside down and drove the end of the long arm into the

box top. Breaking off another stave to make it match the first in height, she stood it with its head against that of the upturned L, then pressed her cigarette against the touching sulfurous heads.

'Now watching!' she commanded. A sudden flare of flame ensued, and as the fire ran down the staves the upright match curled upward and seemed to dangle from the crossbar of the L. 'What is?' she asked us almost gleefully.

'The man on the flying trapeze?' I ventured, but she shook her head until her ear-drops scintillated in the fire-light.

'But no, great stupid one!' she chided. 'Is execution – hanging. See, this one' – she pointed to the fire-curved match – 'is criminal hanged on gibbet. Perhaps he was –'

'A Menshevik who suffered justly for his crimes against the People's Revolution?' Softly pronounced, the interruption came in slurring, almost hissing accents from the doorway, and we turned with one accord to see a man and woman standing on the threshold.

He was a lean, compactly put together man of something more than medium height, exceedingly ugly, with thin black eyebrows and yellowish-tinted skin. His head was absolutely hairless, yet his scalp had not that quality of glossiness we ordinarily associate with baldness. Rather, it seemed to have a suède-like dullness which threw no answering gleam back from the hall lamp under which he stood. His small, side-slanting eyes were black as obsidian and his pointed chin thrust out. His companion wore a blue raincoat, tight-buttoned to the throat, and above its collar showed her face, dead-white beneath short, jet-black hair brushed flat against her head. Her brows were straight and narrow, the eyes below them black as prunes; her lips were a thin, scarlet line. She looked hard and muscular, not masculine, but sexless as a hatchet.

*

I saw terror like cold flame wither my companions' faces as they looked up at the trespassers. Although they said no word I knew the chill and ominous fore-knowledge of sure death was on them.

'See here,' I snapped as I rose from my chair, 'what d'ye mean by coming in this way -'

'Sit down, old man,' the woman interrupted in a low, cold voice. 'Keep still and we'll not hurt you -'

'"Old man?"' I choked. To have my house invaded in this way was injury, to be called an old man - that was added insult. 'Get out!' I ordered sharply. 'Get out of here, or - ' The gleam of light upon the visitors' pistol barrels robbed my protest of authority.

'We have come to execute these traitors to the People's Cause,' the man announced. 'You have doubtless heard of us from them. I am Boris Proudhon, commissar of People's Justice. This is Matrona Rimsky -'

'And you will both oblige me greatly if you elevate your hands!' Standing framed in the front door, Jules de Grandin swung his automatic pistol in a threatening arc before him. He was smiling, but not pleasantly, and from the flush upon his ordinarily pale cheeks I knew he must have hurried through the rain.

There was corrosive, vitriolic hatred in the woman's voice as she wheeled toward him. 'Bourgeois swine; capitalistic dog!' she spat, her pistol raised.

There was no flicker in de Grandin's smile as he shot her neatly through the forehead, nor did he change expression as he told the man, 'It is a pity she should go to hell alone, *Monsieur*. You had better keep her company.' His pistol snapped a second spiteful, whip-like crack, and Boris Proudhon stumbled forward on the body of his companion spy and fellow murderer.

'*Tiens*, I've followed them for hours,' the Frenchman said as he came into the drawing-room, stepping daintily around

the huddled bodies. 'I saw them lurking in the shadows when I left the house, and knew they had no good intentions. Accordingly I circled back when I had reached the corner, and lay in wait to watch them. When they moved, so did I. When they so skilfully undid the front door lock all silently, I was at their elbows. When they announced intention to commit another murder – *eh bien*, it is not healthy to do things like that when Jules de Grandin is about.'

'But it was scarcely eight o'clock when you went out; it's past eleven now. Surely you could have summoned the police,' I protested. 'Was it necessary that you shoot –'

'Not necessary, but desirable,' he interrupted. 'I know what's in your thought, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I can fairly see that Anglo-Saxon mind of yours at work. "He shot a woman!" you accuse, and are most greatly shocked. *Pour-quoi?* I have also shot the female of the leopard and the tiger when occasion called for it. I have set my heel upon the heads of female snakes. Had it been a rabid bitch I shot in time to save two lives you would have thought I did a noble service. Why, then, do you shudder with smug horror when I eliminate a blood-mad female woman? These two sent countless innocents to Siberia and death when they worked for the Tsarist government. As agents of the Soviets they fed their bloodlust by a hundred heartless killings. They murdered the great savant Pavlovitch in cold blood, they would have done the same for Nikakova and Serge had I not stopped them. *Tenez*, it was no vengeance that I did; it was an execution.'

Aksakoff and Nikakova crossed the room and knelt before him, and in solemn turn took his right hand and raised it to their brows and lips. To me it seemed absurd, degrading, even, but they were Russians, and the things they did were ingrained as their thoughts. Also – I realized it with a start of something like surprise – Jules de Grandin was a Frenchman, emotional, mercurial, lovable and loving, but – a

Frenchman. Therefore, he was logical as Fate. He lived by sentiment, but of sentimentality he had not a trace.

It was this realization which enabled me to stifle my instinctive feeling of repugnance as he calmly called police headquarters and informed them that the murderers of Doctor Pavlovitch were waiting at my house – ‘for the wagon of the morgue.’

Haunting Columns

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The walls of Luxor broke the silver sand
When stars were golden lepers in the night,
And, granite monsters in the pallid light,
They lurched like drunken Titans through the land,
With giant strides, most terrible and grand.
They ringed me when the slender moon was bright,
And gazing up their cold, inhuman height,
Shrieked and writhed and beat them with my hand.

Then dawn spread far her amaranthine gleam,
And I could feel my brain to opal turn.
That on the iron hinges of the dream
Shattered to glowing shards that freeze and burn.
God grant my bones lie silver on the plain
Ere yet the walls of Luxor come again.

Beyond the Wall of Sleep

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

What strange, splendid yet terrible experiences came to the poor mountaineer in the hours of sleep? – a story of a supernal being from Algol, the Demon-Star

I have often wondered if the majority of mankind ever pause to reflect upon the occasionally titanic significance of dreams, and of the obscure world to which they belong. Whilst the greater number of our nocturnal visions are perhaps no more than faint and fantastic reflections of our waking experiences – Freud to the contrary with his puerile symbolism – there are still a certain remainder whose immundane and ethereal character permits of no ordinary interpretation, and whose vaguely exciting and disquieting effect suggests possible minute glimpses into a sphere of mental existence no less important than physical life, yet separated from that life by an all but impassable barrier. From my experience I cannot doubt but that man, when lost to terrestrial consciousness, is indeed sojourning in another and uncorporeal life of far different nature from the life we know, and of which only the slightest and most indistinct memories linger after waking. From those blurred and fragmentary memories we may infer much, yet prove little. We

may guess that in dreams life, matter, and vitality, as the earth knows such things, are not necessarily constant; and that time and space do not exist as our waking selves comprehend them. Sometimes I believe that this less material life is our truer life, and that our vain presence on the terraqueous globe is itself the secondary or merely virtual phenomenon.

It was from a youthful revery filled with speculations of this sort that I arose one afternoon in the winter of 1900-01, when to the state psychopathic institution in which I served as an interne was brought the man whose case has ever since haunted me so unceasingly. His name, as given on the records, was Joe Slater, or Slaader, and his appearance was that of the typical denizen of the Catskill Mountain region; one of those strange, repellent scions of a primitive Colonial peasant stock whose isolation for nearly three centuries in the hilly fastnesses of a little-traveled countryside has caused them to sink to a kind of barbaric degeneracy, rather than advance with their more fortunately placed brethren of the thickly settled districts. Among these odd folk, who correspond exactly to the decadent element of 'white trash' in the South, law and morals are non-existent; and their general mental status is probably below that of any other section of the native American people.

Joe Slater, who came to the institution in the vigilant custody of four state policemen, and who was described as a highly dangerous character, certainly presented no evidence of his perilous disposition when I first beheld him. Though well above the middle stature, and of somewhat brawny frame, he was given an absurd appearance of harmless stupidity by the pale, sleepy blueness of his small watery eyes, the scantiness of his neglected and never-shaven growth of yellow beard, and the listless drooping of his heavy nether lip. His age was unknown, since among his kind neither family records nor permanent family ties exist; but from the bald-

ness of his head in front and from the decayed condition of his teeth, the head surgeon wrote him down as a man of about forty.

From the medical and court documents we learned all that could be gathered of his case: This man, a vagabond, hunter and trapper, had always been strange in the eyes of his primitive associates. He had habitually slept at night beyond the ordinary time, and upon waking would often talk of unknown things in a manner so bizarre as to inspire fear even in the hearts of an unimaginative populace. Not that his form of language was at all unusual, for he never spoke save in the debased patois of his environment; but the tone and tenor of his utterances were of such mysterious wildness, that none might listen without apprehension. He himself was generally as terrified and baffled as his auditors, and within an hour after awakening would forget all that he had said, or at least all that had caused him to say what he did; relapsing into a bovine, half-amiable normality like that of the other hill-dwellers.

As Slater grew older, it appeared, his matutinal aberrations had gradually increased in frequency and violence; till about a month before his arrival at the institution had occurred the shocking tragedy which caused his arrest by the authorities. One day near noon, after a profound sleep begun in a whisky debauch at about five of the previous afternoon, the man had roused himself most suddenly, with ululations so horrible and unearthly that they brought several neighbors to his cabin — a filthy sty where he dwelt with a family as indescribable as himself. Rushing out into the snow, he had flung his arms aloft and commenced a series of leaps directly upward in the air; the while shouting his determination to reach some 'big, big cabin with brightness in the roof and walls and floor and the loud queer music far away.' As two men of moderate size sought to restrain him, he had struggled with maniacal force and fury, screaming of his desire and need to find and kill a

certain 'thing that shines and shakes and laughs'. At length, after temporarily felling one of his detainers with a sudden blow, he had flung himself upon the other in a demoniac ecstasy of blood-thirstiness, shrieking fiendishly that he would 'jump high in the air and burn his way through anything that stopped him'.

Family and neighbors had now fled in a panic, and when the more courageous of them returned, Slater was gone, leaving behind an unrecognizable pulp-like thing that had been a living man but an hour before. None of the mountaineers had dared to pursue him, and it is likely that they would have welcomed his death from the cold; but when several mornings later they heard his screams from a distant ravine they realized that he had somehow managed to survive, and that his removal in one way or another would be necessary. Then had followed an armed searching-party, whose purpose (whatever it may have been originally) became that of a sheriff's posse after one of the seldom popular state troopers had by accident observed, then questioned, and finally joined the seekers. .

On the third day Slater was found unconscious in the hollow of a tree, and taken to the nearest jail, where alienists from Albany examined him as soon as his senses returned. To them he told a simple story. He had, he said, gone to sleep one afternoon about sundown after drinking much liquor. He had awaked to find himself standing bloody-handed in the snow before his cabin, the mangled corpse of his neighbor Peter Slader at his feet. Horrified, he had taken to the woods in a vague effort to escape from the scene of what must have been his crime. Beyond these things he seemed to know nothing, nor could the expert questioning of his interrogators bring out a single additional fact.

That night Slater slept quietly, and the next morning he wakened with no singular feature save a certain alteration of

expression. Doctor Barnard, who had been watching the patient, thought he noticed in the pale blue eyes a certain gleam of peculiar quality, and in the flaccid lips an all but imperceptible tightening, as if of intelligent determination. But when questioned, Slater relapsed into the habitual vacancy of the mountaineer, and only reiterated what he had said on the preceding day.

On the third morning occurred the first of the man's mental attacks. After some show of uneasiness in sleep, he burst forth into a frenzy so powerful that the combined efforts of four men were needed to bind him in a straitjacket. The alienists listened with keen attention to his words, since their curiosity had been aroused to a high pitch by the suggestive yet mostly conflicting and incoherent stories of his family and neighbors. Slater raved for upward of fifteen minutes, babbling in his backwoods dialect of green edifices of light, oceans of space, strange music, and shadowy mountains and valleys. But most of all did he dwell upon some mysterious blazing entity that shook and laughed and mocked at him. This vast, vague personality seemed to have done him a terrible wrong, and to kill it in triumphant revenge was his paramount desire. In order to reach it, he said, he would soar through abysses of emptiness, *burning* every obstacle that stood in his way. Thus ran his discourse, until with the greatest suddenness he ceased. The fire of madness died from his eyes, and in dull wonder he looked at his questioners and asked why he was bound. Dr Barnard unbuckled the leather harness and did not restore it till night, when he succeeded in persuading Slater to don it of his own volition, for his own good. The man had now admitted that he sometimes talked queerly, though he knew not why.

Within a week two more attacks appeared, but from them the doctors learned little. On the *source* of Slater's visions they speculated at length, for since he could neither read nor write, and had apparently never heard a legend or fairy-tale,

his gorgeous imagery was quite inexplicable. That it could not come from any known myth or romance was made especially clear by the fact that the unfortunate lunatic expressed himself only in his own simple manner. He raved of things he did not understand and could not interpret; things which he claimed to have experienced, but which he could not have learned through any normal or connected narration. The alienists soon agreed that abnormal dreams were the foundation of the trouble; dreams whose vividness could for a time completely dominate the waking mind of this basically inferior man. With due formality Slater was tried for murder, acquitted on the ground of insanity, and committed to the institution wherein I held so humble a post.

I have said that I am a constant speculator concerning dream-life, and from this you may judge of the eagerness with which I applied myself to the study of the new patient as soon as I had fully ascertained the facts of his case. He seemed to sense a certain friendliness in me, born no doubt of the interest I could not conceal, and the gentle manner in which I questioned him. Not that he ever recognized me during his attacks, when I hung breathlessly upon his chaotic but cosmic word-pictures; but he knew me in his quiet hours, when he would sit by his barred window weaving baskets of straw and willow, and perhaps pining for the mountain freedom he could never again enjoy. His family never called to see him; probably it had found another temporary head, after the manner of decadent mountain folk.

By degrees I commenced to feel an overwhelming wonder at the mad and fantastic conceptions of Joe Slater. The man himself was pitifully inferior in mentality and language alike; but his glowing, titanic visions, though described in a barbarous disjointed jargon, were assuredly things which only a superior or even exceptional brain could conceive. How, I often asked myself, could the stolid imagination of a Catskill

degenerate conjure up sights whose very possession argued a lurking spark of genius? How could any backwoods dullard have gained so much as an idea of those glittering realms of supernal radiance and space about which Slater ranted in his furious delirium? More and more I inclined to the belief that in the pitiful personality who cringed before me lay the disordered nucleus of something beyond my comprehension; something infinitely beyond the comprehension of my more experienced but less imaginative medical and scientific colleagues.

And yet I could extract nothing definite from the man. The sum of all my investigation was, that in a kind of semi-corporeal dream-life Slater wandered or floated through resplendent and prodigious valleys, meadows, gardens, cities, and palaces of light, in a region unbounded and unknown to man; that there he was no peasant or degenerate, but a creature of importance and vivid life, moving proudly and dominantly, and checked only by a certain deadly enemy, who seemed to be a being of visible yet ethereal structure, and who did not appear to be of human shape, since Slater never referred to it as a *man*, or as aught save a *thing*. This *thing* had done Slater some hideous but unnamed wrong, which the maniac (if maniac he were) yearned to avenge.

From the manner in which Slater alluded to their dealings, I judged that he and the luminous *thing* had met on equal terms; that in his dream existence the man was himself a luminous *thing* of the same race as his enemy. This impression was sustained by his frequent references to *flying through space* and *burning* all that impeded his progress. Yet these conceptions were formulated in rustic words wholly inadequate to convey them, a circumstance which drove me to the conclusion that if a true dream world indeed existed, oral language was not its medium for the transmission of thought. Could it be that the dream soul inhabiting this inferior body was desperately struggling to speak things which the simple

and halting tongue of dullness could not utter? Could it be that I was face to face with intellectual emanations which would explain the mystery if I could but learn to discover and read them? I did not tell the older physicians of these things, for middle age is skeptical, cynical, and disinclined to accept new ideas. Besides, the head of the institution had but lately warned me in his paternal way that I was overworking; that my mind needed a rest.

It had long been my belief that human thought consists basically of atomic or molecular motion, convertible into ether waves of radiant energy like heat, light and electricity. This belief had early led me to contemplate the possibility of telepathy or mental communication by means of suitable apparatus, and I had in my college days prepared a set of transmitting and receiving instruments somewhat similar to the cumbrous devices employed in wireless telegraphy at that crude, pre-radio period. These I had tested with a fellow-student, but achieving no result, had soon packed them away with other scientific odds and ends for possible future use.

Now, in my intense desire to probe into the dream-life of Joe Slater, I sought these instruments again, and spent several days in repairing them for action. When they were complete once more I missed no opportunity for their trial. At each outburst of Slater's violence, I would fit the transmitter to his forehead and the receiver to my own, constantly making delicate adjustments for various hypothetical wavelengths of intellectual energy. I had but little notion of how the thought-impressions would, if successfully conveyed, arouse an intelligent response in my brain, but I felt certain that I could detect and interpret them. Accordingly I continued my experiments, though informing no one of their nature.

It was on the twenty-first of February, 1901, that the thing occurred. As I look back across the years I realize how unreal

it seems, and sometimes half wonder if old Doctor Fenton was not right when he charged it all to my excited imagination. I recall that he listened with great kindness and patience when I told him, but afterward gave me a nerve-powder and arranged for the half-year's vacation on which I departed the next week.

That fateful night I was wildly agitated and perturbed, for despite the excellent care he had received, Joe Slater was unmistakably dying. Perhaps it was his mountain freedom that he missed, or perhaps the turmoil in his brain had grown too acute for his rather sluggish physique; but at all events the flame of vitality flickered low in the decadent body. He was drowsy near the end, and as darkness fell he dropped off into a troubled sleep.

I did not strap on the straitjacket as was customary when he slept, since I saw that he was too feeble to be dangerous, even if he woke in mental disorder once more before passing away. But I did place upon his head and mine the two ends of my cosmic 'radio', hoping against hope for a first and last message from the dream world in the brief time remaining. In the cell with us was one nurse, a mediocre fellow who did not understand the purpose of the apparatus, or think to inquire into my course. As the hours wore on I saw his head droop awkwardly in sleep, but I did not disturb him. I myself, lulled by the rhythmical breathing of the healthy and the dying man, must have nodded a little later.

The sound of weird lyric melody was what aroused me. Chords, vibrations, and harmonic ecstasies echoed passionately on every hand, while on my ravished sight burst the stupendous spectacle of ultimate beauty. Walls, columns, and architraves of living fire blazed effulgently around the spot where I seemed to float in air, extending upward to an infinitely high vaulted dome of indescribable splendor. Blending with this display of palatial magnificence, or rather, supplanting it at times in kaleidoscopic rotation, were

glimpses of wide plains and graceful valleys, high mountains and inviting grottoes, covered with every lovely attribute of scenery which my delighted eyes could conceive of, yet formed wholly of some glowing, ethereal plastic entity, which in consistency partook as much of spirit as of matter. As I gazed, I perceived that my own brain held the key to these enchanting metamorphoses; for each vista which appeared to me was the one my changing mind most wished to behold. Amidst this elysian realm I dwelt not as a stranger, for each sight and sound was familiar to me; just as it had been for uncounted eons of eternity before, and would be for like eternities to come.

Then the resplendent aura of my brother of light drew near and held colloquy with me, soul to soul, with silent and perfect interchange of thought. The hour was one of approaching triumph, for was not my fellow-being escaping at last from a degrading periodic bondage; escaping for ever, and preparing to follow the accursed oppressor even unto the uttermost fields of ether, that upon it might be wrought a flaming cosmic vengeance which would shake the spheres? We floated thus for a little time, when I perceived a slight blurring and fading of the objects around us, as though some force were recalling me to earth – where I least wished to go. The form near me seemed to feel a change also, for it gradually brought its discourse toward a conclusion, and itself prepared to quit the scene, fading from my sight at a rate somewhat less rapid than that of the other objects. A few more thoughts were exchanged, and I knew that the luminous one and I were being recalled to bondage, though for my brother of light it would be the last time. The sorry planet shell being well-nigh spent, in less than an hour my fellow would be free to pursue the oppressor along the Milky Way and past the hither stars to the very confines of infinity.

A well-defined shock separates my final impression of the fading scene of light from my sudden and somewhat shame-faced awakening and straightening up in my chair as I saw the dying figure on the couch move hesitantly. Joe Slater was indeed awakening, though probably for the last time. As I looked more closely, I saw that in the sallow cheeks shone spots of color which had never before been present. The lips, too, seemed unusual, being tightly compressed, as if by the force of a stronger character than had been Slater's. The whole face finally began to grow tense, and the head turned restlessly with closed eyes.

I did not rouse the sleeping nurse, but readjusted the slightly disarranged headbands of my telepathic 'radio', intent to catch any parting message the dreamer might have to deliver. All at once the head turned sharply in my direction and the eyes fell open, causing me to stare in blank amazement at what I beheld. The man who had been Joe Slater, the Catskill decadent, was now gazing at me with a pair of luminous, expanding eyes whose blue seemed subtly to have deepened. Neither mania nor degeneracy was visible in that gaze, and I felt beyond a doubt that I was viewing a face behind which lay an active mind of high order.

At this juncture my brain became aware of a steady external influence operating upon it. I closed my eyes to concentrate my thoughts more profoundly, and was rewarded by the positive knowledge that *my long-sought mental message had come at last*. Each transmitted idea formed rapidly in my mind, and though no actual language was employed, my habitual association of conception and expression was so great that I seemed to be receiving the message in ordinary English.

'*Joe Slater is dead,*' came the soul-petrifying voice of an agency from beyond the wall of sleep. My opened eyes sought the couch of pain in curious horror, but the blue eyes were still calmly gazing, and the countenance was still intelligently

animated. 'He is better dead, for he was unfit to bear the active intellect of cosmic entity. His gross body could not undergo the needed adjustments between ethereal life and planet life. He was too much an animal, too little a man; yet it is through his deficiency that you have come to discover me, for the cosmic and planet souls rightly should never meet. He has been in my torment and diurnal prison for forty-two of your terrestrial years.

'I am an entity like that which you yourself become in the freedom of dreamless sleep. I am your brother of light, and have floated with you in the effulgent valleys. It is not permitted me to tell your waking earth-self of your real self, but we are all roamers of vast spaces and travelers in many ages. Next year I may be dwelling in the Egypt which you call ancient, or in the cruel empire of Tsan Chan which is to come three thousand years hence. You and I have drifted to the worlds that reel about the red Arcturus, and dwelt in the bodies of the insect-philosophers that crawl proudly over the fourth moon of Jupiter. How little does the earth self know life and its extent! How little, indeed, ought it to know for its own tranquillity!

'Of the oppressor I cannot speak. You on earth have unwittingly felt its distant presence – you who without knowing idly gave the blinking beacon the name of *Algol, the Demon-Star*. It is to meet and conquer the oppressor that I have vainly striven for eons, held back by bodily encumbrances. Tonight I go as a Nemesis bearing just and blazingly cataclysmic vengeance. *Watch me in the sky close by the Demon-Star.*

'I cannot speak longer, for the body of Joe Slater grows cold and rigid, and the coarse brains are ceasing to vibrate as I wish. You have been my only friend on this planet – the only soul to sense and seek for me within the repellent form which lies on this couch. We shall meet again – perhaps in the shining mists of Orion's Sword, perhaps on a bleak

plateau in prehistoric Asia, perhaps in unremembered dreams tonight, perhaps in some other form an eon hence, when the solar system shall have been swept away.'

At this point the thought-waves abruptly ceased, and the pale eyes of the dreamer – or can I say dead man? – commenced to glaze fishily. In a half-stupor I crossed over to the couch and felt of his wrist, but found it cold, stiff, and pulseless. The sallow cheeks paled again, and the thick lips fell open, disclosing the repulsively rotten fangs of the degenerate Joe Slater. I shivered, pulled a blanket over the hideous face, and awakened the nurse. Then I left the cell and went silently to my room. I had an instant and unaccountable craving for a sleep whose dreams I should not remember.

The climax? What plain tale of science can boast of such a rhetorical effect? I have merely set down certain things appealing to me as facts, allowing you to construe them as you will. As I have already admitted, my superior, old Doctor Fenton, denies the reality of everything I have related. He vows that I was broken down with nervous strain, and badly in need of the long vacation on full pay which he so generously gave me. He assures me on his professional honor that Joe Slater was but a low-grade paranoiac, whose fantastic notions must have come from the crude hereditary folk-tales which circulated in even the most decadent of communities. All this he tells me – yet I cannot forget what I saw in the sky on the night after Slater died. Lest you think me a biased witness, another pen must add this final testimony, which may perhaps supply the climax you expect. I will quote the following account of the star *Nova Persei* verbatim from the pages of that eminent astronomical authority, Professor Garrett P. Serviss:

'On February 22, 1901, a marvelous new star was discovered by Doctor Anderson of Edinburgh, *not very far from Altol*. No star had been visible at that point before. Within

twenty-four hours the stranger had become so bright that it outshone Capella. In a week or two it had visibly faded, and in the course of a few months it was hardly discernible with the naked eye.'

The Garden of Adompha

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A strange and fantastic tale about a weird tree that grew in the garden of King Adompha and bore strange fruit through the sorceries of a dwarfish wizard.

Lord of the sultry, red parterres
And orchards sunned by hell's unsetting flame!
Amid thy garden blooms the Tree which bears
Unnumbered heads of demons for its fruit;
And, like a slithering serpent, runs the root
That is called Baaras;
And there the forky, pale mandragoras,
Self-torn from out the soil, go to and fro,
Calling upon thy name:
Till men new-damned will deem that devils pass,
Crying in wrathful frenzy and strange woe.

— *Ludar's Litany to Thasaidon.*

It was well known that Adompha, king of the wide orient isle of Sotar, possessed amid his far-stretching palace grounds a garden secret from all men except himself and the court magician, Dwerulas. The square-built granite walls of the

garden, high and formidable as those of a prison, were plain for all to see, rearing above the stately beefwood and camphor trees, and broad plots of multi-colored blossoms. But nothing had ever been ascertained regarding its interior: for such care as it required was given only by the wizard beneath Adompha's direction; and the twain spoke thereof in deep riddles that none could interpret. The thick brazen door responded to a mechanism whose mystery they shared with none other; and the king and Dwerulas, whether separately or together, visited the garden only at those hours when others were not abroad. And none could verily boast that he had beheld even so much as the opening of the door.

Men said that the garden had been roofed over against the sun with great sheets of lead and copper, leaving no cranny through which the tiniest star could peer down. Some swore that the privacy of its masters during their visits was ensured by a lethean slumber which Dwerulas, through his magic art, was wont to lay at such times upon the whole vicinity.

A mystery so salient could hardly fail to provoke curiosity, and sundry different beliefs arose concerning the garden's nature. Some averred that it was filled with evil plants of nocturnal habit, that yielded their swift and mordant poisons for Adompha's use, along with more insidious and baleful essences employed by the warlock in the working of his enchantments. Such tales, it seemed, were perhaps not without authority: since, following the construction of the closed garden, there had been at the royal court numerous deaths attributable to poisoning, and disasters that were plainly the sendings of a wizard, together with the bodily vanishment of people whose mundane presence no longer pleased Adompha or Dwerulas.

Other tales, of a more extravagant kind, were whispered among the credulous. That legend of unnatural infamy, which had surrounded the king from childhood, assumed a more hideous tinge; and Dwerulas, who had reputedly been

sold to the Archdemon before birth by his haggish mother, acquired a new blackness of renown as one exceeding all other sorcerers in the depth and starkness of his abandonment.

Waking from such slumber and such dreams as the juice of the black poppy had given him, King Adompha rose in the dead, stagnant hours between moonset and dawn. About him the palace lay hushed like a charnel-house, its occupants having yielded to their nightly sopor of wine, drugs and arrack. Around the palace, the gardens and the capital city of Loithé slept beneath the slow stars of windless southern heavens. At this time Adompha and Dwerulas were wont to visit the high-walled close with little fear of being followed or observed.

Adompha went forth, pausing but briefly to turn the covert eye of his black bronze lantern into the lampless chamber adjoining his own. The room had been occupied by Thuloneah, his favorite odalisque for the seldom-equalled period of eight nights; but he saw without surprise or disconcertion that the bed of disordered silks was now empty. By this, he felt sure that Dwerulas had preceded him to the garden. And he knew, moreover, that Dwerulas had not gone idly or unburdened.

The grounds of the palace, steeped everywhere in unbroken shadow, appeared to maintain that secrecy which the king preferred. He came to the shut brazen door in the blankly towering granite wall; emitting, as he approached it, a sharp sibilation like the hissing of a cobra. In response to the rising and falling of this sound, the door swung inward silently, and closed silently behind him.

The garden, planted and tilled so privily, and sealed by its metal roof from the orbs of heaven, was illumined solely by a strange fiery globe that hung in mid-air at the center. Adompha regarded this globe with awe, for its nature and purveyance were mysterious to him. Dwerulas claimed that

it had risen from hell on a moonless midnight at his bidding, and was levitated by infernal power, and fed with the never-dying flames of that clime in which the fruits of Thasaidon swelled to unearthly size and enchanted savor. It gave forth a sanguine light, in which the garden swam and weltered as if seen through a luminous mist of blood. Even in the bleak nights of winter, the globe yielded a genial warmth; and it fell never from its weird suspension; though without palpable support; and beneath it the garden flourished balefully, lush and exuberant as some parterre of the nether circles.

Indeed, the growths of that garden were such as no terrestrial sun could have fostered, and Dwerulas said that their seed was of like origin with the globe. There were pale, bifurcated trunks that strained upward as if to disroot themselves from the ground, unfolding immense leaves like the dark and ribbed wings of dragons. There were amaranthine blossoms, broad as salvers, supported by arm-thick stems that trembled continually.

And there were many other weird plants, diverse as the seven hells, and having no common characteristics other than the scions which Dwerulas had grafted upon them here and there through his unnatural and necromantic art.

These scions were the various parts and members of human beings. Consummately, and with never-failing success, the magician had joined them to the half-vegetable, half-animate stocks, on which they lived and grew thereafter, drawing an ichor-like sap. Thus were preserved the carefully chosen souvenirs of a multitude of persons who had inspired Dwerulas and the king with distaste or ennui. On palmy boles, beneath feathery-tufted foliage, the heads of eunuchs hung in bunches, like enormous black drupes. A bare, leafless creeper was flowered with the ears of delinquent guardsmen. Misshapen cacti were fruited with the breasts of women, or foliated with their hair. Entire limbs or torsos had been united with monstrous trees. Some of the huge salver-like

blossoms bore palpitating hearts, and certain smaller blooms were centered with eyes that still opened and closed amid their lashes. And there were other graftings, too obscene or repellent for narration.

Adompha went forward among the hybrid growths, which stirred and rustled at his approach. The heads appeared to crane toward him a little, the ears quivered, the breasts shuddered lightly, the eyes widened or narrowed as if watching his progress. These human remnants, he knew, lived only with the sluggish life of the plants, shared only in their sub-animal activity. He had regarded them with a curious and morbid esthetic pleasure, had found in them the infallible attraction of things enormous and hypernatural. Now, for the first time, he passed among them with a languid interest. He began to apprehend that fatal hour when the garden, with all its novel thaumaturgies, would offer no longer a refuge from his inexorable ennui.

At the core of the strange pleasance, where a circular space was still vacant amid the crowding growths, Adompha came to a mound of loamy, fresh-dug earth. Beside it, wholly nude, and pale and supine as if in death, there lay the odalisque Thuloneah. Near her, various knives and other implements, together with vials of liquid balsams and viscid gums that Dwerulas used in his grafting, had been emptied upon the ground from a leathern bag. A plant known as the *dedaim*, with a bulbous, pulpy, whitish-green bole from whose center rose and radiated several leafless reptilian boughs, dripped upon Thuloneah's bosom an occasional drop of yellowish-red ichor from incisions made in its smooth bark.

Behind the loamy mound, Dwerulas rose to view with the suddenness of a demon emerging from his subterrene lair. In his hands he held the spade with which he had just finished digging a deep and grave-like hole. Beside the regal stature and girth of Adompha, he seemed no more than a wizened

dwarf. His aspect bore all the marks of immense age, as if dusty centuries had sored his flesh and sucked the blood from his veins. His eyes glowed in the bottom of pit-like orbits; his features were black and sunken as those of a long-dead corpse; his body was gnarled as some millennial desert cedar. He stooped incessantly, so that his lank, knotty arms hung almost to the ground. Adompha marveled, as always, at the well-nigh demoniac strength of those arms; marveled that Dwerulas could have wielded the heavy shovel so expeditiously, could have carried to the garden on his back without human aid the burden of those victims whose members he had utilized in his experiments. The king had never demeaned himself to assist at such labors; but, after indicating from time to time the people whose disappearance would in no wise displease him, had done nothing more than watch and supervise the baroque gardening.

'Is she dead?' Adompha questioned, eyeing the luxurious limbs and body of Thuloneah without emotion.

'Nay,' said Dwerulas, in a voice harsh as a rusty coffin-hinge, 'but I have administered to her the drowsy and overpowering juice of the *dedaim*. Her heart beats impalpably, her blood flows with the sluggishness of that mingled ichor. She will not reawaken . . . save as a part of the garden's life, sharing its obscure sentience. I wait now your further instructions. What portion . . . or portions?'

'Her hands were very deft,' said Adompha, as if musing aloud, in reply to the half-uttered question. 'They knew the subtle ways of love and were learned in all amorous arts. I would have you preserve her hands . . . but nothing else.'

The singular and magical operation had been completed. The fair, slim, tapering hands of Thuloneah, severed cleanly at the wrists, were attached with little mark of suture to the pale and lopped extremities of the two topmost branches of the *dedaim*. In this process the magician had employed the

gums of infernal plants, and had repeatedly invoked the curious powers of certain underground genii, as was his wont on such occasions. Now, as if in supplicance, the semi-vegetable arms reached out toward Adompha with their human hands. The king felt a revival of his old interest in Dwerulas's horticulture, a queer excitement woke within him before the mingled grotesquery and beauty of the grafted plant. At the same time there lived again in his flesh the subtle ardors of outworn nights . . . for the hands were filled with memories.

He had quite forgotten Thuloneah's body, lying close by with its maimed arms. Recalled from his reverie by the sudden movement of Dwerulas, he turned and saw the wizard stooping above the unconscious girl, who had not stirred during the whole course of the operation. Blood still flowed and puddled upon the dark earth from the stumps of her wrists. Dwerulas, with that unnatural vigor which informed all his movements, seized the odalisque in his pipy arms and swung her easily aloft. His air was that of a laborer resuming his unfinished task; but he seemed to hesitate before casting her into the hole that would serve as a grave; where, through seasons warmed and illumined by the hell-drawn globe, her hidden, decaying body would feed the roots of that anomalous plant which bore her own hands for scions. It was as if he were loath to relinquish his voluptuous burden. Adompha, watching him curiously, was aware as never before of the stark evil and turpitude that flowed like an overwhelming fetor from Dwerulas's hunched body and twisted limbs.

Deeply as he himself had gone into all manner of iniquities, the king felt a vague revulsion. Dwerulas reminded him of a loathsome insect that he had once surprised during its ghoulish activities. He remembered how he had crushed the insect with a stone . . . and remembering, he conceived one of those bold and sudden inspirations that had always impelled

him to equally sudden action. He had not, he told himself, entered the garden with any such thought: but the opportunity was too urgent and too perfect to be overpassed. The wizard's back was turned to him for the nonce; the arms of the wizard were encumbered with their heavy and pulchritudinous load. Snatching up the iron spade, Adompha brought it down on the small, withered head of Dwerulas with a fair amount of war-like strength inherited from heroic and piratic ancestors. The dwarf, still carrying Thuloneah, toppled forward into the deep pit.

Posing the spade for a second blow if such should be necessary, the king waited; but there was neither sound nor movement from the grave. He felt a certain surprise at having overcome with such ease the formidable magician, of whose superhuman powers he was half convinced; a certain surprise, too, at his own temerity. Then, reassured by his triumph, the king bethought him that he might try an experiment of his own: since he believed himself to have mastered much of Dwerulas's peculiar skill and lore through observation. The head of Dwerulas would form a unique and suitable addition to one of the garden plants. However, upon peering into the pit, he was forced to relinquish this idea: for he saw that he had struck only too well and had reduced the sorcerer's head to a state in which it was useless for his experiment, since such graftings required a certain integrity of the human part or member.

Reflecting, not without disgust, on the unlooked-for frailty of the skulls of magicians, which were easily squashed as emus' eggs, Adompha began to fill the pit with loam. The prone body of Dwerulas, the huddled form of Thuloneah beneath it, sharing the same inertness, were soon covered from view by the soft and dissolving clods. The king, who had grown to fear Dwerulas in his heart, was aware of a distinct relief when he had tamped the grave down very firmly and had leveled it smoothly with the surrounding soil. He told

himself that he had done well: for the magician's stock of learning had come latterly to include too many royal secrets; and power such as his, whether drawn from nature or from occult realms, was never quite compatible with the secure dominion and prolonged empire of kings.

2

At King Adompha's court and throughout the sea-bordering city of Loithé, the vanishment of Dwerulas became the cause of much speculation but little inquiry. There was a division of opinion as to whether Adompha or the fiend Thasaidon could be thanked for so salutary a riddance; and in consequence, the king of Sotar and the lord of the seven hells were both feared and respected as never before. Only the most redoubtable of men or demons could have made away with Dwerulas, who was said to have lived through a whole millennium, never sleeping for one night, and crowding all his hours with iniquities and sorceries of a sub-tartarean blackness.

Following the inhumation of Dwerulas, a dim sentiment of fear and horror, for which he could not altogether account, had prevented the king from revisiting the sealed garden. Smiling impassively at the wild rumors of the court, he continued his search for novel pleasures and violent or rare sensations. In this, however, he met with small success: it seemed that every path, even the most outré and tortuous, led only to the hidden precipice of boredom. Turning from strange loves and cruelties, from extravagant pomps and mad music; from the aphrodisiac censers of far-sought blossoms, the quaintly shapen breasts of exotic girls, he recalled with new longing those semi-animate floral forms that had been endowed by Dwerulas with the most provocative charms of women.

So, on a latter night, at an hour midway between moonfall and sunrise, when all the palace and the city of Loithé were plunged in sodden slumber, the king arose from beside his concubine and went forth to the garden that was now secret from all men excepting himself.

In answer to the cobra-like sibilation, which alone could actuate its cunning mechanism, the door opened to Adompha and closed behind him. Even as it closed, he grew aware that a singular change had come upon the garden during his absence. Burning with a bloodier light, a more torrid radiation, the mysterious air-hung globe glared down as if fanned by wrathful demons; and the plants, which had grown excessively in height, and were muffled and hooded with a heavier foliage than they had worn priorly, stood motionless amid an atmosphere that was like the heated breath of some crimson hell.

Adompha hesitated, doubtful of the meaning of these changes. For a moment he thought of Dwerulus, and recalled with a slight shiver certain unexplained prodigies and necromantic feats performed by the wizard . . . But he had slain Dwerulas and had buried him with his own royal hands. The waxing heat and radiance of the globe, the excessive growth of the garden, were no doubt due to some uncontrolled natural process.

Held by a strong curiosity, the king inhaled the giddy perfumes that came to assail his nostrils. The light dazzled his eyes, filling them with queer, unheard-of colors; the heat smote upon him as if from a nether solstice of infernal summer. He thought that he heard voices, almost inaudible at first, but mounting anon to a half-articulate murmur that seduced his ear with unearthly sweetness. At the same time he seemed to behold amid the stirless vegetation, in flashing glimpses, the half-veiled limbs of dancing bayaderes; limbs that he could not identify with any of the graftings made by Dwerulas.

Drawn by the charm of mystery and seized by a vague intoxication, the king went forward into the hell-born labyrinth. The plants recoiled gently when he neared them, and drew back on either side to permit his passage. As if in arboreal masquerade, they seemed to hide their human scions behind the mantles of their new-grown leafage. Then, closing behind Adompha, they appeared to cast off their disguise, revealing wilder and more anomalous fusions than he had remembered. They changed about him from instant to instant like shapes of delirium, so that he was never quite sure how much of their semblance was tree and flower, how much was woman and man. By turns he beheld a swinging of convulsed foliage, a commotion of riotous limbs and bodies. Then, by some undiscerned transition, it seemed that they were no longer rooted in the ground but were moving about him on dim, fantastic feet, in ever-swiftening circles, like the dancers of some bewildering festival.

Around and around Adompha raced the forms that were both floral and human; till the dizzy madness of their motion swirled with an equal vertigo through his brain. He heard the sougling of a storm-driven forest, together with a clamoring of familiar voices that called him by name, that cursed or supplicated, mocked or exhorted, in myriad tones of warrior, councilor, slave, courtling, castrado or leman. Over all, the sanguine globe blazed down with an ever-brightening and more baleful effulgence, an ardor that became always more insupportable. It was as if the whole life of the garden turned and rose and flamed ecstatically to some infernal culmination.

King Adompha had lost all memory of Dwerulas and his dark magic. In his senses burned the ardor of the hell-risen orb, and he seemed to share the delirious motion and ecstasy of those obscure shapes by which he was surrounded. A mad ichor mounted in his blood; before him hovered the vague images of pleasures he had never known or suspected: pleas-

ures in which he would pass far beyond the ordained limits of mortal sensation.

Then, amid that whirling fantasmagoria, he heard the screeching of a voice that was harsh as some rusty hinge on the lifted lid of a sarcophagus. He could not understand the words: but, as if a spell of stillness had been uttered, the whole garden resumed immediately a hushed and hooded aspect. The king stood in a very stupor: for the voice had been that of Dwerulas! He looked about him wildly, bemazed and bewildered, seeing only the still plants with their mantling of profuse leafage. Before him towered a growth which he somehow recognized as the *dedaim*, though its bulb-shaped bole and elongated branches had put forth a matted mass of dark, hair-like filaments.

Very slowly and gently, the two topmost branches of the *dedaim* descended till their tips were level with Adompha's face. The slender, tapering hands of Thuloneah emerged from their foliage and began to caress the king's cheeks with that lover-like adroitness which he still remembered. At the same moment, he saw the thick hairy matting fall apart upon the broad and flattish top of the *dedaim*'s bole; and from it, as if rearing from hunched shoulders, the small, wizened head of Dwerulas rose up to confront him . . .

Still gazing in vacuous horror at the crushed and blood-clotted cranium, at the features sered and blackened as if by centuries, at the eyes that glowed in dark pits like embers blown by demons, Adompha had the confused impression of a multitude of people that hurled themselves upon him from every side. There were no longer any trees in that garden of mad minglings and sorcerous transmutations. About him in the fiery air swam faces that he recalled only too well: faces now contorted with malign rage and the lethal lust of revenge. Through an irony which Dwerulas alone could have conceived, the soft fingers of Thuloneah con-

tinued to caress him, while he felt the clutching of numberless hands that tore all his garments into rags and shredded all his flesh with their nails.

Cordelia's Song

By VINCENT STARRETT

(From 'The King in Yellow')

The moon shines whitely ; I shall take
My silk umbrella, lest the moon
Too warmly fall upon the lake
And cause my bridal flowers to swoon.

The sparrow's sorrow is in vain,
And so does he his bride forget.
I wed the long grass and the rain,
And seven sailors dripping wet.

And shall not you and shall not I
Keep tryst beside this silent stream,
Who thought that we should rather die
Than wed the peacock's amber dream?

The moon shines whitely ; I shall take
My silk umbrella, lest the moon
Too coldly fall upon the lake
And chill my bridal flowers too soon.

Beyond the Phoenix

By HENRY KUTTNER

'A tale of Elak of Atlantis, and an evil priest who was more than human and who worshipped a foul god – a tale of perilous sorcery and thrilling action

1. A King Dies

And the torchlight touched the pale hair
Where silver clouded gold,
And the frame of his face was made of cords,
And a young lord turned among the lords
And said: 'The King is old.'

G. K. Chesterton.

'I won't kill you quickly,' said Lycon, a fierce grin of satisfaction on his round face. 'No. I've suffered your insults too long. I must bring an offering each day to the altar of your stinking god, eh? An ear for that!'

He brought down his sword in a vicious sweep.

'Good! Now your nose, Xandar – you've sniffed out too many victims with it already. Thus – ' Again steel flashed.

'And an eye, Xandar – see? I remove it with the point. Very carefully. For a copper coin I'd make you eat it.'

'Drunken little fool,' Elak said, coming over to the table.

'Leave that roasted pig alone. It won't be fit to eat after you've finished carving it.'

Lycon looked down at the succulent brown carcass on the great wooden platter. 'I've not hurt it,' he said sullenly.

'You'll be having us swinging by our necks if you keep yelling threats against Xandar. I don't like him any more than you do. But – under the king – he rules Sarhaddon.'

This, unhappily, was true. Since the two adventurers had come to Sarhaddon, a little-known city in western Atlantis, they had risen high in the service of King Phrygior, eventually attaining posts in his personal bodyguard. But they had more than once incurred the dislike of the high priest, Xandar, perhaps because they were outlanders who had come from the seaport city of Poseidonia. At any rate, Xandar disliked the two, and took pains to make this clear. It was within his power to levy tribute from any citizen, and therefore Lycon's purse was usually empty. He stole as much as was safe from Elak, but the latter had lately become suspicious.

'I don't like this,' Elak said now, his dark wolf-face set in harsh lines. 'We're supposed to be with the king now. Always, when he's asleep, his men guard him. Yet the captain sends us down here to the kitchen to wait for – eh? A message, he said.'

'This is as good a place as any,' Lycon observed, draining a huge drinking-horn. 'What foul mead! Twelve cups and I can still walk. It was not like this in Poseidonia.'

Elak turned away in disgust. He went to a mullioned window and stared down at the lights of the city, spreading over Sarhaddon Valley. Gaunt granite cliffs rose all about them, and a silver tracery near by marked the course of Syra River. It flowed under the castle, to disappear, so the tales went, into the Gates of the Phoenix, a place in which Elak did not believe, but in which every other inhabitant of the city did. He knew, of course, the traditional death-ceremony of the kings. Their bodies were placed aboard a royal barge,

and set adrift on Syra – and returned, as the tavern stories went – to the land of their fathers beyond the Phoenix Gates.

Elak grunted softly and touched the hilt of a slim rapier that hung at his side.

‘I’m going back,’ he said. ‘Wait if you want. I’ve a feeling –’

Without finishing, he hurried into the hall and up a winding stone stairway, followed by Lycon, who was gulping mead from a horn as he came. The staircase was a long one, for King Phrygior slept in a high tower that rose above the gray stone battlements of the castle. And the sound of furious battle came to Elak and made him whip out his rapier, snarling a bitter oath.

‘Curse Lokar for a traitor!’ he whispered, blade ready as he bounded up. Behind him the drinking-horn dropped from Lycon’s hand and went clashing and ringing down; but the noise it made could not be heard above the tumult in the king’s apartments. Elak gained the ante-room and stood for a moment staring.

At his side and below him the deep well of the tower dropped down, bounded by the winding staircase. Yet, somehow, it seemed to Elak that as he stared into the room a dozen feet away he was looking into the abyss of a pit even deeper – a bottomless well that stretched beyond infinity. A blackness lay beyond the threshold, almost tangible in its tenebrous intensity. It was as though a jet curtain had been stretched across the doorway, barring entry.

Yet from beyond came the sound of battle, and abruptly the king’s voice in a shout of agony.

Impulse rather than reason sent Elak forward, plunging across the threshold, breaking through the dark veil. For a brief instant the chill of polar lands clawed at his flesh, and he was blind. Then Elak was in the midst of a shambles, his

sight restored, and as he saw from the corner of his eye the black curtain behind him had disappeared completely.

The room was a wreck. Priceless tapestries had been torn down and lay in sword-ripped tatters, smeared with blood. Not a piece of furniture was upright. Above the familiar smell of incense rose the acrid odor of sweat and blood, and at Elak's feet a man lay with his throat torn open, rags of cartilage protruding from the ghastly wound. A dozen corpses were here – few men survived. One of these was Lokar, captain of the guard, who was just swinging his sword down in a stroke that would have decapitated Phrygior, who was clawing at an overturned table in a desperate endeavor to regain his feet.

Elak moved with lightning speed. His rapier, sword-arm and body formed one incredibly swift thrust of movement, and Lokar shouted and let go his sword, which clashed harshly on the stones as it fell. The giant soldier whirled, clutching an impaled wrist from which red spurted. He saw Elak, and bellowed wordless rage.

Ignoring his wounded arm, Lokar sprang for Elak. And Elak made a motion of giving ground, his rapier hanging loose. At the last moment the adventurer leaned forward, bracing one foot on the flagging, and whipped around the rapier-point with flashing, deadly speed. Lokar saw the danger too late. The slender blade ground into his eye, burst through the thin shell of bone, and sheathed itself in the man's brain.

'Look out – 'ware, Elak!' Lycon shouted from the doorway. Elak swung about, teeth bared. One living enemy faced him – an unarmed man. Yet, inexplicably, Elak felt an icy shudder crawl down his spine at sight of this man – Xandar the priest.

He was a hunchback – yet no dwarf. His body, though warped and twisted hideously, was gigantic, and great

muscles surged beneath the swarthy skin. Above the flattened, hairless head rose the hump, its horror strangely enhanced by the rich gold cloth that draped it. One side of the creature's face was a mangled, featureless slab of scar tissue, remnant of some long-past battle. The red lips, singularly shapely on the left side, widened into a shocking lipless hole on the other.

The monster roared, 'Ho, you fool! Back! Swiftly!'

'I serve the king, not you, gargoye,' Elak grunted, and lifted his weapon. At his feet Phrygior stirred, his white beard all slobbered and bespattered with blood. And now Elak saw a dagger's hilt embedded in the king's bare breast, center of a widening crimson stain.

Again the priest bellowed, 'Back! Back!'

And Elak, moving forward on cat-like feet, hesitated. An indefinable warning tingled within his brain. He paused, staring at Xandar.

Was it illusion? The monster's warped body seemed to be growing larger, impossibly increasing in bulk till it seemed to tower within the room. Elak shook his head, cursing. What madness was this? He tried to peer at Xandar, and found himself blinking through a dark, hazy mist that slowly grew thicker. Wavering in the dimness stood the shapeless pillar that was Xandar, now shrinking, now swelling to Elak's warped vision. Whence the fog had sprung he did not know, but the subtle evil of it tore at the fortress of his mind with warning fingers. There was danger here – deadly danger. Strong in his nostrils was a sickly-sweet smell, musky, somehow reminiscent of the odor of growing things – but not things that grew in any healthy manner. Rather the disgusting miasma of life that sprang from foul corruption, fungi and lichen bursting from spores and feeding on rotten carcasses . . .

He heard Lycon's hoarse breathing behind him, and the sound brought back his courage. Xandar was a vague shadow

– but at that shadow Elak lunged, rapier leveled. He felt himself smothered suddenly by a blacker darkness, and found his breath stopped by the horrible, miasmatic stench. Then there was the familiar feeling of flesh ripping under his steel, the grinding jar of metal clashing on bone, rippling up the rapier to his hand. From the priest burst a bellow of agony.

And the shout changed to words – a frantic cry in syllables Elak did not recognize, though their unearthly sound made him wonder. Grinning harshly, he once more sent steel arrowing through the shadow – vainly, this time.

And the darkness lifted, faded as though a veil had been withdrawn. Elak stood staring in the center of the room, gasping with amazement. He whirled.

‘Lycon! Did he get past you?’

The little man shook his head, glancing at his heavy sword. ‘Ishtar, no! I’d have split him from pate to groin –’

‘There must be a hidden passage in the wall,’ Elak said, and dropped beside the king. Phrygior’s bearded lips parted to swallow the wine Elak forced between them. Eyes cold as gray stone looked into the adventurer’s – and a blazing spark leaped into them.

‘The priest! Kill him!’

‘He’s gone,’ Elak said. ‘The others –’

Phrygior looked down, touched with weak fingers the dagger-hilt in his breast. He said hoarsely, ‘Leave it. To unsheathe it now would kill me in a moment. First I must –’ He fumbled toward the wine-flask. ‘Esarra – my daughter – summon her.’

Elak made a quick gesture. ‘Get the princess, Lycon. I’ll guard the king.’

‘No need – now. Xandar has – accomplished his design.’ Elak held the flask to Phrygior’s lips while the dying man drank deeply, and soon, strengthened, he began again.

‘The priest has plotted against me for long, Elak. Some of

his dogs were in my guard, and tonight they killed the ones who remained faithful. He has long desired the throne – and Esarra. But he dared not defy the Phoenix – the god of Sarhaddon's kings. Thus he sought aid – more wine, Elak. My blood drains fast . . .

'So. Baal-Yagoth – you know not the name. Few remember, yet ages and ages ago when the gods dwelt on earth, Baal-Yagoth was the power of evil, the embodiment of dark lust. He sought to establish his dominion over the world, but in a great battle Assurah, the Phoenix, overthrew him, imprisoned him in the land of the gods . . . and now Assurah sleeps, and Xandar has called Baal-Yagoth out of the dark lands to rule Sarhaddon. Only a man crazed with venom and hatred would have dared, for the black god can have no power on earth till a human willingly opens up his soul and brain for Baal-Yagoth's dwelling-place. Within Xandar dwells his god.'

Now Elak remembered what had happened when he had attacked the priest.

The king drank more wine. 'My strength goes fast. Unless Esarra arrives speedily – ' He stiffened in a spasm of agony. 'Elak! I cannot wait! Your arm –'

Elak extended his hand, and Phrygior seized it. From his own wrist he took a bracelet of black stone, on which were carved symbols Elak did not recognize. But on the largest lozenge was the outline of a phoenix, eagle-shaped, rubies and gold aping the mythical bird's coloring. Swiftly the king snapped the bracelet on Elak's sinewy arm. It felt curiously cold.

Phrygior touched the phoenix with grotesque, archaic gestures. He murmured a phrase – and his grim face, already shadowed with death, lightened. 'Only the Phoenix may unloose the sacred bracelet from your wrist now,' he said quietly. 'You must go to Assurah – beyond the Gates of the Phoenix. Listen well, Elak, for my strength ebbs.

‘At the foot of this tower a tapestry is on the wall, with a dragon battling a basilisk. Touch the basilisk’s eyes thrice. Once press the dragon’s eyes. A door will open, and you must go through it with your companion, taking Esarra so she will not fall into Xandar’s hands. A barge has long waited at the end of the passage you’ll find – waited for my corpse. I would have you – take me with you. Esarra will guide you. She is of the Phoenix blood –’

Quite suddenly the indomitable will that had kept Phrygior alive failed. He gave a convulsive shudder, arching his back in agony, while froth bubbled on the white beard. Then he fell back and so died, scarcely an instant before Esarra and Lycon crossed the threshold.

The girl flew to her father’s side, while Elak arose, eyeing Lycon’s reddened sword. The small adventurer nodded briefly.

‘More of Xandar’s dogs. I killed ’em. The girl helped, too – her dagger drew blood as often as my sword. What now?’

There was little time to explain. A few words told Esarra how matters stood, and she hastened down the stairway, while Elak followed, bearing the corpse of the king. After him Lycon descended warily.

The tower’s floor seemed deserted, though from not far away came the clash of ringing steel and the shouts of men. The great tapestry stretched across one wall. Elak saw that the eyes of the basilisk and the dragon were gems, and he pressed these as Phrygior had commanded. With scarcely a sound one of the stone flags lifted, revealing a staircase leading down to blackness.

Lycon snatched a flambeau from its socket and led the way, while Elak, after a futile attempt to close the secret trapdoor, followed the girl. He eyed her curiously as her profile was from time to time outlined against the torchlight. A beauty, he thought. The regal cast of her face was softened by its

warm humanity, and brown curls clung damply to her pale forehead. The slender, delicate curves of her body were scarcely hidden by the silken night-dress, ripped in more than one place so that ivory flesh shone through.

Behind him Elak heard the pound of footsteps; he called a warning, and the three hastened their pace. The stairs gave way to a corridor, stone-walled and dank, and this in turn opened into a low-roofed, broad chamber. A narrow ledge ran around its base; below the ledge was water, blackly ominous. A barge floated in the huge pool.

Elak had but a glimpse of dark silks and velvets, a jewel-studded canopy that was a fitting covering for a king's corpse. He leaped aboard the barge, put down his burden, and whirled, rapier out. A hasty glance around showed that the cavern had but one other opening – metal gates, corroded and green with verdigris, that descended from the roof to below the water's surface. Then from the tunnel-mouth burst the pursuers – Xandar's men, swords red, baying like hounds as they ran.

'Lycon! To me!' Elak shouted, but the little man did not answer. The tall adventurer bounded back to the ledge, spitting the foremost attacker through the throat, and deftly wrenching the rapier free as the man fell to splash into the water. He caught sight of Lycon and Esarra working desperately at a great bar of metal – a lever – that hung from the roof. Then Elak forgot all else in a red blaze of battle.

Three men he slew, and was himself wounded in the shoulder, while a flung blade missed his jugular by an inch and sliced his cheek. There was a grinding roar of hidden machinery, and Elak heard a frantic shout from Lycon. He turned to see the barge plunging away on the breast of a descending torrent.

Ignoring the men who were now pressing in to the kill, Elak leaped. A spear screamed past his head as he jumped, and he saw it thud into the barge's side. Ironically, that

weapon saved him. He fell short, and his clutching fingers found the haft of the spear. For a second it held, and then Lycon's hands were on his wrists, tugging him to safety.

Above the barge rose the gaunt gray stones of the castle. Already the swift current had carried the craft beyond the door, and the three were safe from pursuit. It was, however, impossible to land, for there were neither poles nor oars. They drifted into a steadily deepening gorge, with the roar of the Syra rising into a thundering madness in their ears.

2. The Opening of the Gates

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather-flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes,
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.
—Swinburne.

The river raced into the heart of the mountains that surrounded Sarhaddon, till the blue sky was a brilliant narrow path above, jaggedly outlined by the towering scarps. The three on the barge could do nothing; it was impossible to talk below a shout. Nevertheless Elak explained to his companions what had happened.

'Ishtar!' Lycon screamed above the torrent's roar. 'I never trusted that devil Xandar! Did you kill him, do you think?'

Elak shook his head. 'Got his arm, I think. That's all.' Reminded of his own arm, he began to dress it, while Esarra

went to stand in the barge's prow, peering ahead into the mists beneath a pale, shading hand. It was her cry that brought the others.

'The Gates! The Phoenix Gates!'

Slowly they came into view through the clouds of spray, swimming into half-vividness and then fading again into fog, but growing ever closer – gates that towered up from the torrent, up and up for a hundred feet, constructed of metal that had never been stained or corroded by the unceasing drive of the water. Silvery-white they were, shot with pale bluish gleams. On their center was a phoenix, huge as three men's height, red as the fiery heart of a ruby, yellow as the golden rivers that wash Cathay. Crest proudly raised, the stupendous effigy seemed to stare down upon Syra River – at the three on the barge. And the current drove the craft remorselessly toward the gates.

'Gods!' Elak said tonelessly, his voice lost in the thunder of the waters. 'The river goes under the gates! We'll be dragged down –'

Esarra gripped his arm. 'The bracelet! Let the phoenix see –'

Uncomprehendingly Elak let the girl lift his bare arm till the phoenix bracelet gleamed distinctly through the mists. Was it merely his fancy that a brief, flashing ray of light seemed to leap out between bracelet and the image on the gates? If so, what followed was certainly not imagination. The gates opened. Silently they parted, disclosing glowing depths beyond them, and the barge raced through unharmed. Briefly it surged and rocked with the current, and then steadied as the gates closed once more. It was oddly silent now. They were in a cavern, glowing with weird brilliance. Violet gleams played over the walls.

Without warning came the inexplicable. There was a flashing, swift movement, and abruptly the barge was surrounded by a transparent, circular wall that seemed to be rising from

the waters all around. Elak looked about warily, ready to drag out his rapier at the first sign of danger.

The glass wall lifted. It drew together above the barge, forming a dome. What slight trace of sound had drifted through the Phoenix Gates from the bellowing river was lost completely. Deathly silence fell.

Elak said, 'I don't like this. It's like a prison. Princess, what -'

Esarra shrugged slim shoulders. 'Assurah knows! But the kings of Sarhaddon have traveled this road longer than men remember.' Her gaze went to where Phrygior's body lay beneath the great jeweled canopy. There was a little sob in her voice as she went on, 'The legends say that the first king of Sarhaddon came from the land of the phoenix, and his offspring must return there after death. So -'

'Ware!' Lycon yelped. 'Ware, Elak!'

Imperceptibly the water beneath the barge had drained away till the craft rested on a shell of crystal. Now Elak saw that they were within a huge transparent sphere - and a shudder of movement shook it as Lycon cried warning. One shudder - and the globe dropped. Instantly deep blackness blanketed them. There was no sense of motion; yet Elak felt strangely certain that the sphere was dropping - dropping - into unknown depths. A giddiness assailed him. He felt Esarra's soft body flung against him, and his arms tightened about her protectively. Then the weird feeling of movement, almost extra-sensory in its inexplicable certainty, grew stronger; from the phoenix bracelet on his wrist alien magic flowed through him. The darkness lightened. He saw Lycon and Esarra peering around blindly, and knew that they were still blind.

The crystal sphere was dropping down a metallic shaft, the sides of which were merely a blurred gleaming as the speed increased. Briefly a flash of violent red burned Elak's eyeballs, and then came a blaze of pure, deadly white that

sent him flat on his face, fists clenched against his agonized eyes. The sickening giddiness grew stronger – stronger yet –

And gratefully Elak let his mind sink into the black pit of unconsciousness that gaped for him. He slept . . .

Now it seemed to Elak that he dreamed, or so he thought ; for, though his eyes were closed, he clearly saw what occurred around him. There was at first only a thick shroud of fog, swirling slowly in drab grayness; and very slowly this mist faded and was gone. In its place was a cold, blue emptiness that seemed to stretch into infinite distances.

But it was not the sky, despite the gleaming points of light that swam into view like stars. That Elak knew. For the glowing specks grew brighter and larger, and he saw that they resembled flowers, many-petaled – yet no flowers of earth. With a cold and dreadful certainty he knew that they were alive.

They watched him, hanging motionless in the blue vastness, until the grip of nightmare clutched Elak. Nothing existed but these malefic flowers, it seemed, and they seemed to press toward him with avid hunger; they strained against the blueness that held them back. It was impossible to judge their size. They might have been small as a man's hand, and very close; or unimaginably huge and far away. They waited . . .

Now the dream changed. A woman came into Elak's range of vision, slim and dark and vital as a black flame. Red as her lips was the gown she wore, and her eyes and long tresses were midnight black. With slow footsteps she came to stand beside Elak, and in her hand, he saw, she bore a strangely-filigreed chalice. Thin steam ascended from it.

She bent over Elak. The gray mists swirled back, blinding, confusing. Out of the fog loomed the woman's face, arrogantly handsome; her pale hand, and the goblet it bore. She lifted it to Elak's mouth. A cloying fragrance crept into his

nostrils, and involuntary repugnance shuddered through him. The liquor's aroma was subtly sweet. A drop of the fluid touched his lips, and a hot pang raced through every atom of his body.

'Tyrala!'

On the word the woman drew back, hell-flames flaring in her eyes. She whirled to face a figure who came slowly through the mists.

It was a man, small but delicately proportioned, clad in tight-fitting silver garments, and, seeing him, Elak was reminded of the Northmen's god Baldur. The fineness of his beardless face was at variance with a certain assured strength in the dark, lazily amused eyes.

He said again, 'Tyrala, your haste is ill-advised. I had not known of this man's arrival.'

The woman stood rigid, clutching the chalice with white fingers. She hesitated, asked, 'Since when have you stooped to interesting yourself in my slaves, Ithron?'

The man's smile was malicious. 'But is he one of yours? The men of Nyrvana are pale and yellow-haired, even as myself. This one is dark and lean as a wolf. Moreover, he wears a certain sign . . .'

Tyrala glanced at the bracelet on Elak's wrist. For a moment fear shone in her eyes, but she said nothing.

The man, Ithron, chuckled. 'And I think there were others from above, too. Have you forgotten the pact? We two rule over Nyrvana – we two, not you alone. Shall we not judge these intruders – *together?*'

'Aye,' Tyrala said presently, though her face was somber and menacing. 'As you will . . .'

Now the fog closed down again, and darkened into blackness. For a space Elak was unconscious, and he awoke slowly, with an unfamiliar, nauseating taste on his tongue. He sat up,

spitting and cursing. From near by came the sound of Lycon's snores.

The two were lying on low tapestried couches set side by side in the center of a great windowless room. Hangings of red samite hid the walls. From the ceiling was suspended a silvern lamp that cast a vague yellowish radiance. Otherwise the chamber was empty.

Elak got heavily to his feet and kicked Lycon off his couch. 'Wake up!' he commanded. 'We might have had our throats slit as you slept, drunken little dog.'

'More mead,' murmured the drunken little dog, still apparently engrossed in vinous dreams. 'Alas, the cup is empty . . .'

Elak hauled his companion upright by the scruff of the neck. 'I said "wake up",' he grunted. 'We're in some wizard's den or other, and your sword may be needed. I see you've still got it.' He glanced down with satisfaction at the slim rapier at his own belt.

Lycon opened mildly disapproving eyes. 'Our throats are safe, for a while anyhow. They had plenty of time to kill you, if they'd wanted to, last night.'

'What d'you mean?'

'That I woke up to find myself alone in here. I hammered on the door and swore in seven languages, but vainly. So, as there was nothing better to do, I went to sleep again.'

'Where's the princess?' Elak asked suddenly. Lycon shrugged.

'How should I know? Wait till somebody opens the door, Elak. Then we can use our blades. Until then - ' He left the sentence unfinished. A low throbbing musical note sounded, and simultaneously a slit widened in the farther wall.

A man stood in the gap, yellow-haired, slightly built, wearing a loose robe of scarlet. He was unarmed. He lifted his arm in a beckoning gesture.

Elak's hand was on his rapier hilt as he moved forward. 'Where are we?' he asked shortly. 'Where's —'

'You will come with me,' the other said. Elak paused at the expression in the man's blue eyes. They seemed, somehow, withdrawn, as though they looked upon invisible things. No hint of curiosity stirred in their depths. Vaguely, absently, the man looked at Elak, and he said again, 'Come.'

Lycon swaggered to the threshold. 'Lead on,' he commanded. 'But you'd best play no tricks. My sword's sharp!'

The red-robed one turned, led the way along a corridor of white stone, windowless and doorless. Elak and Lycon followed, down the passage, up a winding staircase, lit with the cool pallor of hanging lamps, and down a sloping hall to a door of bronze. A gong clanged, peremptory, harsh. The portals opened.

Beyond the threshold was a great room, high-ceilinged, paved with strangely figured mosaic. Blue smoke drifted up from censers. At the farther end of the room was a dais, and upon it — two thrones.

A throne of gleaming metal, red as sunset-clouds, black-cushioned. And one of pale silver. In the silver seat was a man Elak recognized, small and blond, with lazily amused eyes. In the red throne sat a woman.

Tyralla! Elak did not need to see the goblet on a pedestal at her right hand to recognize her. The black eyes watched enigmatically; slim white fingers and ivory shoulders gleamed against the blaze of crimson that was Tyralla's robe.

Above the thrones and between them, high on the wall, was a phoenix, delicately carved. Coils of incense slid past the jutting beak.

Elak's guide gestured him on. Slowly the two men walked toward the dais. As they paused before it Elak caught a flash of movement from the corner of his eye; he turned to see Esarra hurrying toward them, while another of the slim,

yellow-haired men stood watchfully beside an open door.

'Elak!' The girl's face was white against the clustering chestnut curls; she clung to Elak, trembling a little. A silver gown had replaced the shredded nightdress, and there were silver slippers on the princess's small feet.

'Elak!' she said breathlessly. 'I was afraid -'

Now Esarra saw the two upon the thrones. She swung to face them, shrinking against Elak's protective arm about her waist.

The red-clad woman, Tyrala, glanced aside at her companion. She spoke in an undertone. The man nodded. He leaned forward.

'Have no fear,' he said. 'You have suffered no injury as yet - is that not so?'

Now Elak remembered his vision. He said, 'Perhaps we have you to thank for that - Ithron.'

The woman caught her breath. Ithron's eyebrows lifted.

'Perhaps,' was his only comment. 'However, strangers come to Nyrvana seldom. The Kings of Sarhaddon - yes. They are of the Phoenix blood. But they come only after death, and not for many ages - aye, longer than you think! - have living men come from above.'

'I don't understand you,' Elak said. 'Where are we? Last I remember was falling down a hole in some damned cavern - are we underground?'

'Aye,' Ithron nodded. 'You are in Nyrvana. Far and far is this land from the world above; Nyrvana is within a cave, but a cave so vast you could not span its breadth or height with your eyes.'

Esarra whispered, 'The land of the gods! Where Assurah dwells -' She looked up at the sculptured phoenix.

'And we rule under Assurah,' Ithron said, 'Tyrala and I. Before the phoenix slept, he gave us this charge: to rule Nyrvana and to guard - guard - ' He hesitated, glanced at Tyrala. The woman's baleful gaze dwelt on Elak.

'They are here for judgement,' she said. 'Well? Let us judge!'

'Why are you here?' Ithron asked.

Esarra pulled free from Elak. Standing erect before the dais, regal head raised proudly, she told her story. And as she spoke, Tyrala's gaze grew darker and more ominous, while startled amazement crept into Ithron's eyes.

'So Xandar rules Sarhaddon,' the girl finished. 'And he has slain my father. The law of the Phoenix has been broken. Baal-Yagoth has been freed from his chains –'

'Now by Assurah!' Ithron whispered – and his pale eyes were wide now, and blazing as he glared at the enthroned woman beside him. 'By Assurah and Iod! This is your work, Tyrala!'

Tyrala sprang up, her slim fingers flexing into claws. She spat words at the man.

'Aye – my work! And what of that? It has been long since Assurah ruled, and he has no power now. Shall I rule over this land of shadows for ever, with these pallid slaves of yours to serve me – to drink my wine –'

Elak saw a touch of horror in Ithron's face as he glanced at the chalice beside Tyrala's throne. The woman went on bitterly,

'And if I have called on Baal-Yagoth – what then, my lord Ithron? Who are you to halt me? Serve Assurah then, if you will – rule over Nyrvana! But I have made a pact with a priest of Sarhaddon, and for him I have freed Baal-Yagoth from his chains. Soon now I shall go to the outer world, where there are strong men – men with flame and life blazing within them, like this one here' – she flung out her hand toward Elak – 'and they shall taste my wine!'

'Stop!' Ithron was facing the woman now, his face grim and hard. 'You dare – under the very symbol of Assurah –'

'Aye – I dare! Nor can you thwart me, Ithron. Now I warn you – stay here. Rule Nyrvana. But if you think to meddle

with my plans, you may taste my wine yourself!"

Laughing, Tyrala swept down from the dais, across the room and through open doors of bronze. Ithron turned, flung up his arms at the carved Phoenix on the wall. His voice was a rolling thunder.

'Assurah! Waken! Let your wrath pour down upon this harlot and utterly destroy her!'

The incense drifted up . . .

'Lord of Nyrvana –waken! Baal-Yagoth is risen from his prison and hangs like a shadow over all the world. Smite him with your lightnings; rend him with your iron beak!

'Assurah – god of Sarhaddon! *Waken!*'

3. *Duel of Gods*

The night is gone and the sword is drawn
And the scabbard is thrown away!

– John G. Neihardt.

Very slowly the wall behind the thrones began to move. It slid up, the Phoenix rising with it, and revealed a hazy depth beyond, dimly litten with silver radiance. Ithron turned.

'You three – follow.'

He moved forward confidently. Elak hesitated, felt Esarra tug at his arm. Warily he went toward the gap where the wall had been. Lycon trailed them. His sword brushed the pedestal beside Tyrala's throne, set the goblet rocking. He glanced at it and shuddered.

'Ishtar! I would not taste *that* wine –'

They stood in glowing haze. The wall dropped behind them. Nothing existed now but silvery fog; somehow Elak had a weird feeling that they stood on the very brink of a

gulf that fell away to abysmal depths.

At their feet lay an open coffin. In it was King Phrygior, his dead face relaxed and peaceful. He wore a white robe, and an unsheathed sword rested on his breast.

Esarra dropped to her knees beside the sarcophagus. She whispered something Elak did not hear. Her brown curls fell forward, hiding the cameo face.

Ithron touched the coffin; it slid forward and was gone. The silver mists brightened. Far below came the rolling of deep thunder.

And behind them – the clash of arms! A woman's voice, commanding, angry.

Ithron turned swiftly, gripped Elak's arm. 'Your bracelet! Hold it – thus – ' He lifted Elak's wrist. 'Stay here! Tyrala is mad. But her madness gives her strength; I must keep her at bay till Assurah wakes – '

He was gone. A deep-throated roar came faintly to Elak's ears. Dimly he heard Ithron's voice.

But nothing existed but the mist, and two shadows beside him – Esarra and Lycon, waiting . . . and Elak stood with his arm raised, the Phoenix bracelet shining . . .

Queer tingles darted through his wrist, ran down into his shoulder, racing into every nerve of his body. Flood of power poured into him, shaking the citadel of his mind with its alien strength . . .

The fog alternately darkened and lightened; the muttering of thunder grew louder. And dimly he heard Tyrala's voice raised in a cry of triumph from the throneroom beyond the wall.

'I have won, my lord Ithron! None can waken Assurah now. And you – you shall taste my wine!'

The thunder bellowed ominously. The fog brightened with a blaze of silver radiance, and before him Elak saw something rise up, a cyclopean shadow, almost formless, yet with a suggestion of sweeping wings and a beaked, upthrust head . . .

He heard Esarra cry out, felt Lycon drop to his knees, breath rasping in his throat. From the Phoenix bracelet a tide of primal magic raced through him. The colossal shadow waited in the mist.

Elak felt words rising to his lips without will of his own. He heard himself crying,

‘Assurah! Baal-Yagoth is risen! He has burst his chains –’

Elak was never to understand what happened in the next amazing moment. The power that the bracelet had given him was nothing to the inconceivable flood that crashed down on him from the risen god – flood of strange magic, blinding and deafening him, flaming through his brain like lightning. And dimly he heard a voice within his mind.

‘I give you strength. Go forth and slay!’

Forthwith the tide lifted Elak and bore him weightless back; he had a vague impression of walls and rooms flickering past like segments of a dream, and yet he knew, somehow, that Esarra and Lycon kept pace with him, shoulder to shoulder. Something was in his mind, and Elak’s fingers closed about the hilt of a sword – a blade of flame, white and terrible. All about him the very air shook with unimaginable power . . .

Elak’s vision cleared; he stood in a room and remembered – the room of his dream, where he had first seen Tyrala. The walls were blue as infinity, and in that clear depth hung the glowing flower-things he had already seen. Avidly they waited, with a horrible air of expectation in their attitude, seemingly watching the horror before them.

A muffled drumming throbbed out; shrill insane flutings piped weirdly. There were monstrously misshapen beings that squatted on scaled haunches, demoniac toad-like creatures whose flaming eyes dwelt on the two figures that danced before an altar.

Tyrala – and Ithron! Both nude, Ithron’s pale body in strange contrast to the dark vividness of the witch-woman –

and Ithron dancing, whirling like a weightless leaf in Tyrala's grasp. An empty goblet lay on the stones. Ithron had tasted the dreadful wine!

The two figures moved in a swift, grotesque saraband, to the tune of the evil drumming and the pipes. The flower-things in the walls waited. And as Tyrala and Ithron danced, the strength seemed to be draining from the man – the life itself – pouring as though sucked by evil vampirism into the body of the witch.

Ithron grew shrunken, paper-white, skeletal. And Tyrala's vivid body seemed to drink in life – whirling and swaying with increased energy. Sparks danced eerily in her streaming black hair. Her eyes were pools of lambent radiance.

'Strike!' a voice whispered in Elak's mind.

He scarcely seemed to move, yet the flaming sword in his hand swung up. From its blade poured a cascade of lightnings, crackling, flashing, veiling the room with light. Through the blaze he heard Tyrala's scream, knife-edged, keening with an agony beyond life . . .

And other cries came, thin, utterly horrible. He knew that the glowing flower-things were dying . . .

The curtain of light faded. And now nothing existed within the chamber but an altar, blackened and twisted; the walls were burned and blank, and there were mounds of dust on the floor.

The power caught Elak again, lifting him. He caught a momentary glimpse of a broad vista spread far beneath him, a land of sluggish rivers and dark forests stretching into the distance – and it was gone. Brief blackness, and then a flash of metallic walls sliding past, a shaft up which he sped with frightful rapidity, knowing Esarra and Lycon were beside him . . .

A cavern now, and high gates. A river, under the warm radiance of the sun, tumbling through a craggy gorge. Then

a valley – and Sarhaddon, the castles and walls of Sarhaddon, lay beneath him, and he was slanting down through empty air . . .

Down he swept, through gates and walls and barriers, until he stood in the throneroom of Sarhaddon's kings. On the great carven chair, ornate with gems and precious metals, sat Xandar the priest, his twisted body hung with royal robes. A circlet of gold crowned the bald head. The scarred half of the priest's face was deftly disguised with paints that could not hide the frightful deformity.

A girl lay before the throne, strapped to an engine of torture. Her body was reddened with sword-cuts. She was screaming as cords slowly wrenched her limbs apart.

Around the room stood nobles and priests. On almost every face Elak saw thinly-hidden horror and disgust. One man turned away, and Xandar saw him.

'Ho, you Chemoch!' he roared. 'Are you daintier than your king? Would you share this maiden's couch?'

White-faced, the man looked again at the tortured girl. Yet his hand closed convulsively on his sword-hilt.

And then – the voice whispered again in Elak's mind.

'Slay!'

Elak lifted his blade. A great cry went up within the throneroom; the crowd surged back against the tapestried walls. If they had not seen Elak before – he was surely visible now!

The monster on the throne thrust out clawing hands. He bellowed,

'Baal-Yagoth! Yagoth!'

A cloudy veil swept down over the priest, hiding him in shadow like a shroud. A foul, miasmic stench was strong in Elak's nostrils. He swung the sword.

Lightnings blazed out crashing. They thundered down on the priest, enveloping him in flame. They licked at his armor of black fog, and drew back – impotent!

The air was choked with that charnel smell. The darkness crept out from the priest, fingering toward Elak. Again he lifted his sword.

Again the lightnings flared. And this time Elak moved forward, confidently, doggedly, slashing with blade of fire at the dark tendrils that crept in toward him. As he neared Xandar a cold revulsion shuddered through Elak's flesh. He sensed the nearness of an alien thing, a being so evil that it could exist only in the blackness of the pit.

Lightning and shadow clashed, and the castle rocked with thunderous conflict. The priest roared insane blasphemy.

The blackness coalesced into a tenebrous cloud. Out of it rose a head, malefic and terrible, with serpent eyes of ancient evil. A flattened head that swayed and arose on shimmering scaled coils –

The head of Baal-Yagoth!

It swung down at Elak. He countered desperately with his sword – felt himself driven back.

The shadow of cyclopean wings filled the throneroom with rushing winds. Something, unseen yet tangible, dropped toward that monstrous head. A blinding flare of consuming light crashed out, and for a brief moment Elak saw a gleam of blood-red feathers, eyes golden as the moon, and a striking silver beak.

And the shadow surrounding Xandar faded and was gone. The rearing serpent-head had vanished. Only the priest stood before the throne, stripped of his magic and his power, contorted lips wide in a despairing shriek. His face was a Gorgon mask, seared and blackened into a charred cindery horror.

Eyes of insane rage glared at Elak. The priest sprang forward, hands clawing for Elak's throat.

Once more, and for the last time, the alien voice whispered within Elak's brain.

'Strike!'

Sword of flame screamed through the air. Bone and brain and flesh split under that blow, and for a second Xandar stood swaying, cloven in half from skull to navel, blood spurt-ing in a red tide. A moment the priest stood, and crashed down at Elak's feet dead in a widening crimson pool.

From the court a great cry went up – of triumph and thanksgiving. Elak felt the sword plucked from his hand; it was a flash of light in the air – and then was gone. He stood alone before the throne of Sarhaddon.

The magic had fled. Power of the Phoenix and evil spell of Baal-Yagoth alike were vanished. The nobles pressed forward, shouting.

Elak turned, saw Esarra cutting the last of the cords that bound Xandar's victim to her rack. A guardsman lifted the sobbing girl, bore her out. Esarra obeyed Elak's gesture.

He led her to the throne, seated her in it, and on her slender wrist clasped the Phoenix bracelet he took from his own arm. Elak swung to face the room. His rapier came out, was lifted.

And a hundred swords were unsheathed, shimmering together, at his shout,

'Esarra of Sarhaddon!'

'*Esarra!*' roared the nobles.

They dropped to their knees, heads bent, paying homage to the girl. But Elak felt a soft hand on his shoulder as he knelt, and looked up into Esarra's eyes. The girl whispered,

'Elak – you will stay in Sarhaddon?'

Slowly he nodded, and Esarra sank back on her throne, a little smile curving her red lips, as the nobles arose and came forward one by one, sword-hilts extended for her touch. Elak made his way through the group, looking for Lycon. He found him at last investigating the contents of a drinking-horn.

'We stay in Sarhaddon – for a while anyhow,' he told the little man.

'As you will,' Lycon said, smiling wisely. He glanced toward the throne. 'No doubt you'll be content enough for a few moons. As for me' – he buried his round face in the horn and gulped noisily – 'as for me,' he finished, wiping his mouth with a pudgy hand, 'I hear good reports of the royal wine-cellars. And may the gods blast me if I don't get the keys to 'em before sunset!'

The Black Monk

By G. G. PENDARVES

Woe be to the luckless man who encounters the Black Monk of Chaard Island!

Yes. It's true that I'm dictating this, but don't picture to yourself a famous author, a luxurious study, and a highly paid secretary. No! I'm dictating this for publication because I promised the Abbot of Chaard that I would. I can't go against his wishes. Not again.

'All lies and rubbish! Don't you believe a word of it, sir. It suits them,' the gamekeeper jerked a thumb in the direction of the monastery behind him, 'to keep such fairy-tales alive. Gives them a hold on the people. Everyone on this island believes in the Black Monk, swears they've caught sight of him on the prowl. I never have – and why? Because I'm not afraid. It's all rubbish, so I tell you straight, damned rubbish.'

I looked at Morton. His brown deep-set eyes, his wrinkled face, his long lean body in its ancient brown tweeds, even his old leggings and the way he carried his gun and wore his cap expressed contempt. He'd no use for the monks or for anyone else on the island. Stayed because he'd no chance of work elsewhere. Owed everything to the Abbot and hated him in proportion to his debt.

'They give chapter and verse for it at the monastery,' I ventured. 'Got old documents. Supposed to be treasure buried here in the Fifth Century when Britain was conquered by the English. Brought by a faithful monk who came up the Thames from Kent. Got across here, buried his treasure, and died on the island, keeping guard to the end. And he's still on duty, it appears.'

'Treasure and guardian! Tale for children and the bloody fools that spend their days gabbling prayers when they'd be a sight better digging and planting and weeding on this blamed island of theirs. I'm the only man does a decent day's work here. And what do I get for it? A damp cottage, wages that don't even run to a twist of baccy, and a lecture from his reverence when the monastery kitchen isn't stocked with game to suit him.'

'And so you've never caught a glimpse of the Black Monk?' I persisted. 'Never seen him by the old fish pond, or pacing the cliffs, or going down the Long Lane after sundown?'

'No, nor never will! The only Black Monk on the island is up at the monastery – that colored fellow from the West Indies. They don't want anyone blacker than Brother Ignatius. Looks a proper crow with his black habit and black face and all. Not but what I think he's a deal better in black than in white like these here Benedictines on Chaard.'

'Of course,' I suggested, 'you've got to remember that some people aren't able to see things like – well, like the Black Monk. Just as some people don't take certain diseases.'

'No one's ever seen the Black Monk and no one's ever going to see him. Why? Because he don't happen to be on Chaard Island! The monks keep the old tale going to frighten the people into going regular to mass and confession. And visitors like it. They go round with eyes popping out of their silly heads. They talk and write things to the papers – see! That's all advertisement and helps to bring money in. It's a put-up game and a pack of damned nonsense, I says.'

I left him glooming at his gate and turned down the Long Lane. Morton versus the monks amused me. An idea struck me, result of the recent talk and a most perfect night. A big golden harvest moon was rising. No wind. Mild, almost warm for late October. I'd stay out, all night if necessary, and follow the legendary track of the Black Monk from Pirates' Bay, where he was said to have landed, to a certain wood where he was popularly supposed to have buried his treasure. No one seemed to have tried to stalk him with any method. No one wanted to follow him. His cowed figure had been glimpsed at various points of his route – dark on the pale sands of the landing-beach – melting into shadows cast by Long Lane's steep hedges – a hurrying figure on the skyline of high plowed fields – a tall sentinel by the old neglected green-scummed fish pond – or vanishing into the fir wood.

My brief holiday was almost over. I'd got what I came for – an account of the annual Passion Play the monks gave. It would pay my expenses here. A night's ramble over the romantic island might inspire another article. I lighted a cigarette and made for the beach.

Chard was settling down for sleep already. The revolving brilliance of its lighthouse grew brighter as lamps went out in cottage windows. Down the Long Lane where nut-trees rustled withered leaves, down past the post office *cum* store that served the island's needs, down under the walls of the big white monastery with its towers and turrets, its balconies and chime of bells, its red roofs and steep gables, down to the sand-dunes where tall rushes dipped and whispered in the moonlight, down to the crescent of Pirates' Bay – its fine pale sand ground by thundering surf that now was a mere murmurous line of white edging distant sea.

There I go . . . there I go! I apologize. I'll restrain myself. You'll understand later why the enchanted background of the island on a supremely lovely night is so difficult for me to

keep out of this account. You may forgive a poor devil then for looking back on a lost paradise.

I sat on an upturned boat, smoked and dreamed, let the long strange history of Chaard Island float across my mind like weed on a shallow pool. An hour – two hours – I don't know how long I sat there. My lighter ran dry at last, I had no matches, and the search for them shook me out of dreams. I felt stiff and rather cold.

'Well, you're late if you mean to land tonight, old man!'

I spoke aloud, and glanced back across broken rocks that formed one curving horn of my crescent shore. For a moment, actual funk paralyzed me. For a moment I really believed the absurd legend was true. A dark cowed figure was skirting the rocks – moving toward me.

I confess that I didn't move because literally I couldn't. When I saw at last who it was, relief was so overwhelming that I fairly went off like a rocket.

'Brother Ignatius! Upon my word, d'you know I took you for the Black Monk himself! You loomed up there in the moonlight as big and black as a nursery bogey.'

The West Indian's gentle liquid speech was the friendliest sound I'd ever heard.

'You ought not to be here,' he reproved. 'The Father-Abbot would not like it. You are, in a sense, a guest of the monastery since it governs the whole island and its affairs.'

'I'm only a heretic.' I laughed overloudly. The sound jarred on that quiet lonely shore. 'My soul's more or less lost anyhow in the Abbot's eyes, I expect.'

'Yes,' agreed Brother Ignatius.

I was irrationally annoyed. 'Oh, well, live and let live!' I babbled. My nerves still quivered. My tongue clacked like a toy bell.

'It is difficult, sometimes, to know what that means. It is difficult, sometimes, to say what is life and what is – death.'

I'd never realized what a bore the fellow was. I'd rather liked the gentle simple creature before. Now I was irritated. His prosings had broken the magic spell of the night for me.

'On your way to the monastery, I suppose? I'm going to dawdle about another hour, or so. Good-night.'

'Not alone! No, really, it is not safe for you alone here. The Black Monk -'

'That's why I'm here,' I interrupted the serious quiet voice. 'I'm waiting for him. When and if he shows up I'm going to follow him, discover the long-lost secret of his treasure.'

'You don't understand.' Brother Ignatius was now genuinely perturbed. 'It is very dangerous for you.'

I made an impatient movement, and half turned to leave him.

'If you wish it so much,' his words came slow and hesitant, 'if you have made up your mind - perhaps - it would be better that I should -'

'Well?'

I looked up and caught the faint glimmer of white teeth as his lips parted in a smile under his cowl's dark shadow.

'I think the Father-Abbot would forgive me, since you are, in a sense, his guest. Yes, I will show you. I will lead you to the place where the treasure lies buried.'

'What?'

'Yes. I will take you,' murmured the monk.

'But - there isn't any treasure! It's only a wild old tale. What d'you mean?'

'There *is* treasure - golden glorious treasure,' softly affirmed the other. 'And rather than leave you here, alone, I will show you.'

I began to doubt my companion's sanity. I'd no idea what he was talking about. My journalist's imagination began to weave a new story. Well, why not go with him? My mood for solitude and a night's wandering under the moon was gone.

I'd humor Brother Ignatius. He was stooping toward me, apparently very keen on his idea.

'Have it your own way,' I agreed. 'It may save me from a chill, if not from your friend the Black Monk. By the way, suppose you find him on his job – guarding the treasure!'

'No. You won't see him there. Not if you are with me.'

The grave reply and the air with which he turned to cross the sandhills rather took my fancy. Long cloak swaying and billowing in the rising wind, Brother Ignatius strode a few paces ahead. Given the right clothes, I thought, the colored man does redeem movement from the commonplace.

I could see myself, in plus-fours and cap, a discord, an alien figure on that lonely, lovely silvered shore. I could see the monk as a tree whose dark boughs swept the ground or as a wave rising – falling. Part of the earth, possessed by it and possessing it.

'Must be getting a temperature,' I told myself. 'If I work any little stunt of that sort into my article they'll give me the comic-strip to do.'

A new idea struck me.

'I've never met any of you before at this hour. Aren't there rules? I thought the monastery bolted and barred you in your cells long before this.'

We'd reached the high heathery cliffs above Pirates' Bay. Brother Ignatius kept the lead. His answer came back on the wind, his cowed head turned to me, and again I caught a flashing glimpse of his gentle smile.

'You forget the weeks for retreat.'

He gestured toward a solitary wooden building not a hundred yards distant.

'Of course. I had forgotten. But – if you're in retreat – surely you're breaking your rule now in being here with me.'

'The Father-Abbot would put your safety before a rule of this sort. It means, of course, that the month's solitude must

begin again. It was necessary. Nothing else would have taken you from that dangerous shore – nothing except my promise to take you to the treasure.'

I felt uncomfortable. The Abbot had been extremely courteous to me, given me a good many little privileges, allowed me to go where most visitors are forbidden. To interfere with the religious observance of his order was a poor way of acknowledging his consideration.

Then I shrugged off my qualms. I didn't believe the legend. I didn't think the Abbot believed it. Brother Ignatius had broken his retreat to save me from a non-existent danger, had insisted on this fantastic expedition, and was, in fact, a little mad. I absolved myself from blame and followed on.

At last we came to a small dense wood in a fissure between Hawk's Point and Shark's Fin – two cruel masses of rock jutting out to sea where many ships had piled up in old days. The monk waited.

'Take hold of my cloak,' he advised. 'The path is narrow, but I know every inch of the way. You won't fall if you follow my lead exactly.'

His cloak, between my fingers, was rough and dry as bark. We plunged into the wood. Dark as a shaft here. Fairly smooth underfoot but an endless, endless way. I protested at last.

'We must be going in circles. The wood's small enough to cross in five minutes.'

Brother Ignatius stopped as I spoke.

'We are here now. Sit down. Sit down on the soft mossy earth and rest.'

I sank down, feeling as if I'd walked to the other end of the earth. Something, immensely heavy, cold, and round was put into my hands.

'What's this? Feels like a crown. What a weight! But I can't see a thing. How do I know if this is gold or lead?'

'Gold, pure gold,' Brother Ignatius spoke with awe. 'And

here are plates and goblets and scepters. Here are candlesticks. This is a great jeweled cross that took a lifetime to fashion. This, too, is set with jewels, a little altar lamp, a most precious relic though so small.'

One after another, these things were put into my hands while the monk's quiet voice expatiated on their beauty. I fingered the small heavy lamp. Exasperation seized me.

'But what's the use!' I burst out. 'It's absurd to be fumbling away in the dark like this. I want to see them!'

I stood up suddenly, felt the ground slippery underfoot, reached out for support. I called sharply. The monk's cloak brushed my outstretched hands. I tried to grasp it, slipped again, plunged forward, hit my forehead a smashing blow against a tree-trunk and fell heavily.

My senses returned slowly. Darkness, like walls of black velvet, shut me in – darkness and warmth. The wood had seemed damp and cold before. I felt horribly confused. On all sides my hands encountered brush and thorn. Impossible to take any direction in such complete darkness.

'Where are you?' I shouted. 'Where are you? Hello! Hello! *Helloooo!* Brother Ignatius, where are you?'

I went on shouting. Anger and increasing warmth in the dark wood served at least to heat my stiff chilled body. I grew more and more furious. The monk must be mad as a hatter. Why hadn't anyone warned me about him? Perhaps they hadn't wanted to discredit their precious monastery.

Exhausted, hungry and thirsty, pricked and scratched with thorns, I sat still and yelled until I was hoarse. When a voice hailed me at last I was in pretty bad shape. I felt like bursting into tears instead of answering. It was the gamekeeper, Morton.

'Have you hurt yourself, sir?'

His strong wiry arm was about my shoulders, raising me to my feet.

'Get me out of this confounded wood, Morton!' I demanded. 'I've been hours here. That crazy monk, Brother Ignatius, brought me. I was a fool to follow him, of course, but I'd no idea he was mad.'

Morton made no response save by a sudden stiffening of his arm about me.

'Get me out of this wood, d'you hear!' The darkness was becoming a torture now. 'Get me out and I'll explain afterward. I don't want to spend the rest of the night here.'

'You're not in any wood.' Morton's voice seemed choked and indistinct. 'You're in a gorse-patch on a headland right over at the back of the island. I came after rabbits and heard you yelling.'

'But it's dark! You're drunk, man, you're drunk! It's dark. It's the middle of the night.'

'It's eight o'clock in the morning, sir. And the sun's shining full and early.'

'You're drunk. You're lying. It's perfectly dark. Pitch-black night.'

Then I heard the larks, chimes from the monastery tower for eight o'clock service, chirrup of insects in the grass, lowing of cattle. I knew the truth at last.

I was blind.

'Sir!' Morton's voice came to me from some remote distance. 'It couldn't ha' been Brother Ignatius you saw last night. He left the island day before yesterday along with Brother Stephen and the Prior. I rowed 'em all three to the mainland. No one comes or goes from here without I takes 'em. They won't none of them be back for a month.'

'You *are* drunk, after all, disgracefully drunk!' I talked now to fight back my thoughts. 'No other monk here wears a black habit except Brother Ignatius. How could I possibly mistake a Benedictine's white habit for a black one? I tell you I was with Brother Ignatius for hours. I recognized him – his voice, his smile! It was Brother Ignatius.'

Morton didn't argue. He took me to the monastery. The Abbot heard me out.

'Treasure is buried on this island, I believe.' His slow solemn tone chilled me. 'But it was not Brother Ignatius whom you met on Pirates' Beach.'

'But – but – ' I stuttered, 'I tell you I saw him, talked, walked with him for an hour at least.'

'The monk you met was one who has guarded the treasure through centuries. An ancient and cunning guardian.'

'No! No! No!' I heard myself whispering. 'There is no such one! I met a man – an ordinary man.'

'You met the Black Monk of Chaard Island, for whose tormented weary soul I pray. And for you in darkness and despair, for you, too, I ask deliverance, my son.'

Passing of a God*

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

'You say that when Carswell came into your hospital over in Port au Prince his fingers looked as though they had been wound with string,' said I, encouragingly.

'It is a very ugly story, that, Canevin,' replied Doctor Pelletier, still reluctant, it appeared.

'You promised to tell me,' I threw in.

'I know it, Canevin,' admitted Doctor Pelletier of the US Navy Medical Corps, now stationed here in the Virgin Islands. 'But,' he proceeded, 'you couldn't use this story, anyhow. There are editorial *taboos*, aren't there? The thing is too – what shall I say? – too outrageous, too incredible.'

'Yes,' I admitted in turn, 'there are *taboos*, plenty of them. Still, after hearing about those fingers, as though wound with string – why not give me the story, Pelletier; leave it to me whether or not I "use" it. It's the story I want, mostly. I'm burning up for it!'

'I suppose it's your lookout,' said my guest. 'If you find it too gruesome for you, tell me and I'll quit.'

I plucked up hope once more. I had been trying for this story, after getting little scraps of it which allured and intrigued me, for weeks.

*From WEIRD TALES for January, 1931.

'Start in,' I ventured, soothingly, pushing the silver swizzel-jug after the humidor of cigarettes from which Pelletier was even now making a selection. Pelletier helped himself to the swizzel frowningly. Evidently he was torn between the desire to pour out the story of Arthur Carswell and some complication of feelings against doing so. I sat back in my wicker lounge-chair and waited.

Pelletier moved his large bulk about in his chair. Plainly now he was cogitating how to open the tale. He began, meditatively:

'I don't know as I ever heard public discussion of the malignant bodily growths except among medical people. Science knows little about them. The fact of such diseases, though, is well known to everybody, through campaigns of prevention, the life insurance companies, appeals for funds.

'Well, Carswell's case, primarily, is one of those cases.'

He paused and gazed into the glowing end of his cigarette.

'"Primarily"?' I threw in encouragingly.

'Yes. Speaking as a surgeon, that's where this thing begins, I suppose.'

I kept still, waiting.

'Have you read Seabrook's book, *The Magic Island*, Canevin?' asked Pelletier suddenly.

'Yes,' I answered. 'What about it?'

'Then I suppose that from your own experience knocking around the West Indies and your study of it all, a good bit of that stuff of Seabrook's is familiar to you, isn't it? – the *vodu*, and the hill customs, and all the rest of it, especially over in Haiti – you could check up on a writer like Seabrook, couldn't you, more or less?'

'Yes,' said I, 'practically all of it was an old story to me – a very fine piece of work, however, the thing clicks all the way through – an honest and thorough piece of investigation.'

'Anything in it new to you?'

'Yes – Seabrook's statement that there was an exchange of personalities between the sacrificial goat – at the "baptism" – and the young Black girl, the chapter he calls: *Girl-Cry – Goat-Cry*. That, at least, was a new one on me, I admit.'

'You will recall, if you read it carefully, that he attributed that phenomenon to his own personal "slant" on the thing. Isn't that the case, Canevin?'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'I think that is the way he put it.'

'Then,' resumed Doctor Pelletier, 'I take it that all that material of his – I notice that there have been a lot of story-writers using his terms lately! – is sufficiently familiar to you so that you have some clear idea of the Haitian-African demigods, like Ogoun Badagris, Damballa, and the others, taking up their residence for a short time in some devotee?'

'The idea is very well understood,' said I. 'Mr Seabrook mentions it among a number of other local phenomena. It was an old Negro who came up to him while he was eating, thrust his soiled hands into the dishes of food, surprised him considerably – then was surrounded by worshippers who took him to the nearest *houmfort* or *vodu*-house, let him sit on the altar, brought him food, hung all the jewelry on him, worshipped him for the time being; then, characteristically, quite utterly ignored the original old fellow after the "possession" on the part of the "deity" ceased and reduced him to an unimportant old pantaloon as he was before.'

'That summarizes it exactly,' agreed Doctor Pelletier. 'That, Canevin, that kind of thing, I mean, is the real starting-place of this dreadful matter of Arthur Carswell.'

'You mean – ?' I barged out at Pelletier, vastly intrigued. I had had no idea that there was *vodu* mixed in with the case.

'I mean that Arthur Carswell's first intimation that there was anything pressingly wrong with him was just such a "possession" as the one you have recounted.'

'But – but,' I protested, 'I had supposed – I had every reason to believe, that it was a surgical matter! Why, you just objected to telling about it on the ground that –'

'Precisely,' said Doctor Pelletier, calmly. 'It was such a surgical case, but, as I say, it *began* in much the same way as the "occupation" of that old Negro's body by Ogoun Bad-agris or whichever one of their devilish deities that happened to be, just as, you say, is well known to fellows like yourself who go in for such things, and just as Seabrook recorded it.'

'Well,' said I, 'you go ahead in your own way, Pelletier. I'll do my best to listen. Do you mind an occasional question?'

'Not in the least,' said Doctor Pelletier considerably, shifted himself to a still more pronouncedly recumbent position in my Chinese rattan lounge-chair, lit a fresh cigarette, and proceeded:

'Carswell had worked up a considerable intimacy with the snake-worship of interior Haiti, all the sort of thing familiar to you; the sort of thing set out, probably for the first time in English at least, in Seabrook's book; all the gatherings, and the "baptism", and the sacrifices of the fowls and the bull, and the goats; the orgies of the worshippers, the boom and thrill of the *rata* drums – all that strange, incomprehensible, rather silly-surfaced, deadly-underneathed worship of "the Snake" which the Dahomeyans brought with them to old Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

'He had been there, as you may have heard, for a number of years; went there in the first place because everybody thought he was a kind of failure at home; made a good living, too, in a way nobody but an original-minded fellow like him would have thought of – shot ducks on the Léogane marshes, dried them, and exported them to New York and San Francisco to the United States' two largest Chinatowns.

'For a "failure", too, Carswell was a particularly smart-looking chap – smart, I mean, in the English sense of that

word. He was one of those fellows who was always shaved, clean, freshly groomed, even under the rather adverse conditions of his living, there in Léogane by the salt marshes; and of his trade, which was to kill and dry ducks.

'A fellow can get pretty careless and let himself go at that sort of thing, away from "home"; away, too, from such niceties as there are in a place like Port au Prince.

'He looked, in fact, like a fellow just off somebody's yacht the first time I saw him, there in the hospital in Port au Prince, and that, too, was right after a rather singular experience which would have unnerved or unsettled pretty nearly anybody.

'But not so old Carswell. No, indeed. I speak of him as "Old Carswell", Canevin. That, though, is a kind of affectionate term. He was somewhere about forty-five then; it was two years ago, you see, and, in addition to his being very spick and span, well groomed, you know he looked surprisingly young, somehow. One of those faces which showed experience, but, along with the experience, a philosophy. The lines in his face were *good* lines, if you get what I mean – lines of humor and courage; no dissipation, no let-down kind of lines, nothing of slackness such as you would see in the face of even a comparatively young beach-comber. No, as he strode into my office, almost jauntily, there in the hospital, there was nothing, nothing whatever, about him, to suggest anything else but a prosperous fellow American, a professional chap, for choice, who might, as I say, have just come ashore from somebody's yacht.

'And yet – good God, Canevin, the story that came out –'

Naval surgeon though he was, with service in Haiti, at sea, in Nicaragua and the China Station to his credit, Doctor Pelletier rose at this point, and, almost agitatedly, walked up and down my gallery. Then he sat down and lit a fresh cigarette.

'There is,' he said, reflectively, and as though weighing his

words carefully, 'there is, Canevin, among various others, a somewhat "wild" theory that somebody put forward several years ago, about the origin of malignant tumors. It never gained very much approval among the medical profession, but it has, at least, the merit of originality, and – it was new. Because of those facts, it had a certain amount of currency, and there are those, in and out of medicine, who still believe in it. It is that there are certain nuclei, certain masses, so to speak, of the bodily material which have persisted – not generally, you understand, but in certain cases – among certain persons, the kind who are "susceptible" to this horrible disease, which, in the pre-natal state, did not develop fully or normally – little places in the bodily structure, that is – if I make myself clear? – which remain undeveloped.

'Something, according to this hypothesis, something like a sudden jar, or a bruise, a kick, a blow with the fist, the result of a fall, or whatnot, causes traumatism – physical injury, that is, you know – to one of the focus-places, and the undeveloped little mass of material starts in to grow, and so displaces the normal tissue which surrounds it.

'One objection to the theory is that there are at least two varieties, well-known and recognized scientifically; the carcinoma, which is itself subdivided into two kinds, the hard and the soft carcinoma, and the sarcoma, which is a soft thing, like what is popularly understood by a "tumor". Of course they are all "tumors", particular kinds of tumors, malignant tumors. What lends a certain credibility to the theory I have just mentioned is the malignancy, the growing element. For, whatever the underlying reason, they grow, Canevin, as is well recognized, and this explanation I have been talking about gives a reason for the growth. The "malignancy" is, really, that one of the things seems to have, as it were, its own life. All this, probably, you know?"

I nodded. I did not wish to interrupt. I could see that this side-issue on a scientific by-path must have something to do with the story of Carswell.

'Now,' resumed Pelletier, 'notice this fact, Canevin. Let me put it in the form of a question, like this: To what kind, or type, of *vodu* worshipper, does the "possession" by one of their deities occur – from your own knowledge of such things, what would you say?'

'To the incomplete; the abnormal, to an *old* man, or woman,' said I, slowly, reflecting, 'or – to a child, or, perhaps, to an idiot. Idiots, ancient crones, backward children, "town-fools" and the like, all over Europe, are supposed to be in some mysterious way *en rapport* with deity – or with Satan! It is an established peasant belief. Even among the Mahometans, the moron or idiot is "the afflicted of God". There is no other better established belief along such lines of thought.'

'Precisely!' exclaimed Pelletier, 'and, Canevin, go back once more to Seabrook's instance that we spoke about. What type of person was "possessed"?''

'An old doddering man,' said I, 'one well gone in his dotage apparently.'

'Right once more! Note now, two things. First, I will admit to you, Canevin, that that theory I have just been expounding never made much of a hit with me. It might be true, but – very few first-rate men in our profession thought much of it, and I followed that negative lead and didn't think much of it, or, indeed, much about it. I put it down to the vapors of the theorist who first thought it out and published it, and let it go at that. Now, Canevin, *I am convinced that it is true!* The second thing, then: When Carswell came into my office in the hospital over there in Port au Prince, the first thing I noticed about him – I had never seen him before, you see – was a peculiar, almost an indescribable, discrepancy. It was between his general appearance of weather-worn cleanliness, general fitness, his "smart" appearance in his clothes –

all that, which fitted together about the clean-cut, open character of the fellow; and what I can only describe as a pursiness. He seemed in good condition, I mean to say, and yet – there was something, somehow, *flabby* somewhere in his make-up. I couldn't put my finger on it, but – it was there, a suggestion of something that detracted from the impression he gave as being an upstanding fellow, a good-fellow-to-have-beside-you-in-a-pinch – that kind of person.

'The second thing I noticed, it was just after he had taken a chair beside my desk, was his fingers, and thumbs. They were swollen, Canevin, looked sore, as though they had been wound with string. That was the first thing I thought of, being wound with string. He saw me looking at them, held them out to me abruptly, laid them side by side – his hands I mean – on my desk, and smiled at me.

'“I see you have noticed them, Doctor,” he remarked, almost jovially. “That makes it a little easier for me to tell you what I'm here for. It's – well, you might put it down as a ‘symptom’.”

'I looked at his fingers and thumbs; every one of them was affected in the same way; and ended up with putting a magnifying glass over them.

'They were all bruised and reddened, and here and there on several of them, the skin was abraded, broken, *circularly* – it was a most curious-looking set of digits. My new patient was addressing me again:

'“I'm not here to ask you riddles, Doctor,” he said, gravely, this time, “but – would you care to make a guess at what did that to those fingers and thumbs of mine?”

'“Well,” I came back at him, “without knowing what's happened, it *looks* as if you'd been trying to wear about a hundred rings, all at one time, and most of them didn't fit!”

'Carswell nodded his head at me. “Score one for the

medico," said he, and laughed. "Even numerically you're almost on the dot, sir. The precise number was one hundred and six!"

'I confess, I stared at him then. But he wasn't fooling. It was a cold, sober, serious fact that he was stating; only, he saw that it had a humorous side, and that intrigued him, as anything humorous always did, I found out after I got to know Carswell a lot better than I did then.'

'You said you wouldn't mind a few questions, Pelletier,' I interjected.

'Fire away,' said Pelletier. 'Do you see any light, so far?'

'I was naturally figuring along with you, as you told about it all,' said I. 'Do you infer correctly that Carswell, having lived there, how long, four or five years or so? -'

'Seven, to be exact,' put in Pelletier.

' - that Carswell, being pretty familiar with the native doings, had mixed into things, got the confidence of his Black neighbors in and around Léogane, become somewhat "adept", had the run of the *houmforts*, so to speak - '*votre bougie, M'sieu*' - the fortune-telling at the festivals and so forth, and - had been "visited" by one of the Black deities? That, apparently, if I'm any judge of tendencies, is what your account seems to be leading up to. Those bruised fingers - the one hundred and six rings - good heavens, man, is it really possible?'

'Carswell told me all about that end of it, a little later - yes, that was, precisely, what happened, but - that, surprisingly incredible as it seems, is only the small end of it all. You just wait -'

'Go ahead,' said I, 'I am all ears, I assure you!'

'Well, Carswell took his hands off the desk after I had looked at them through my magnifying glass, and then waved one of them at me in a kind of deprecating gesture.

' "I'll go into all that, if you're interested to hear about it,

Doctor," he assured me, "but that isn't what I'm here about." His face grew suddenly very grave. "Have you plenty of time?" he asked. "I don't want to let my case interfere with anything."

"Fire ahead," says I, and he leaned forward in his chair.

"Doctor," says he, "I don't know whether or not you ever heard of me before. My name's Carswell, and I live over Léogane way. I'm an American, like yourself, as you can probably see, and, even after seven years of it, out there, duck-hunting, mostly, with virtually no White-man's doings for a pretty long time, I haven't 'gone native' or anything of the sort. I wouldn't want you to think I'm one of those wasters." He looked up at me inquiringly for my estimate of him. He had been by himself a good deal; perhaps too much. I nodded at him. He looked me in the eye, squarely, and nodded back. "I guess we understand each other," he said. Then he went on.

"Seven years ago, it was, I came down here. I've lived over there ever since. What few people know about me regard me as a kind of failure, I daresay. But – Doctor, there was a reason for that, a pretty definite reason. I won't go into it beyond your end of it – the medical end, I mean. I came down because of this."

He stood up then, and I saw what made that "discrepancy" I spoke about, that "flabbiness" which went so ill with the general cut of the man. He turned up the lower ends of his white drill jacket and put his hand a little to the left of the middle of his stomach. "Just notice this," he said, and stepped toward me.

"There, just over the left center of that area and extending up toward the spleen, on the left side, you know, there was a protuberance. Seen closely it was apparent that here was some sort of internal growth. It was that which made him look flabby, stomachish.

"This was diagnosed for me in New York," Carswell

explained, "a little more than seven years ago. They told me it was inoperable then. After seven years, probably, I daresay it's worse, if anything. To put the thing in a nutshell, Doctor, I had to 'let go' then. I got out of a promising business, broke off my engagement, came here. I won't expatiate on it all, but – it was pretty tough, Doctor, pretty tough. I've lasted all right, so far. It hasn't troubled me – until just lately. That's why I drove in this afternoon, to see you, to see if anything could be done."

"Has it been kicking up lately?" I asked him.

"Yes," said Carswell, simply. "They said it would kill me, probably within a year or so, as it grew. It hasn't grown – much. I've lasted a little more than seven years, so far."

"Come into the operating-room," I invited him, "and take your clothes off, and let's get a good look at it."

"Anything you say," returned Carswell, and followed me back into the operating-room then and there.

I had a good look at Carswell, first, superficially. That preliminary examination revealed a growth quite typical, the self-contained, not the "fibrous" type, in the location I've already described, and about the size of an average man's head. It lay imbedded, fairly deep. It was what we call "encapsulated". That, of course, is what had kept Carswell alive.

"Then we put the X-rays on it, fore-and-aft, and sidewise. One of those things doesn't always respond very well to skiagraphic examination, to the X-ray, that is, but this one showed clearly enough. Inside it appeared a kind of dark, triangular mass, with the small end at the top. When Doctor Smithson and I had looked him over thoroughly, I asked Carswell whether or not he wanted to stay with us, to come into the hospital as a patient, for treatment.

"I'm quite in your hands, Doctor," he told me. "I'll stay, or do whatever you want me to. But, first," and for the first time he looked a trifle embarrassed, "I think I'd better tell

you the story that goes with my coming here! However, speaking plainly, do you think I have a chance?"

"Well," said I, "speaking plainly, yes, there is a chance, maybe a 'fifty-fifty' chance, maybe a little less. On the one hand, this thing has been let alone for seven years since original diagnosis. It's probably less operable than it was when you were in New York. On the other hand, we know a lot more, not about these things, Mr Carswell, but about surgical technique, than they did seven years ago. On the whole, I'd advise you to stay and get ready for an operation, and, say about 'forty-sixty' you'll go back to Léogane, or back to New York if you feel like it, several pounds lighter in weight and a new man. If it takes you, on the table, well, you've had a lot more time out there gunning for ducks in Léogane than those New York fellows allowed you."

"I'm with you," said Carswell, and we assigned him a room, took his "history", and began to get him ready for his operation.

'We did the operation two days later, at ten-thirty in the morning, and in the meantime Carswell told me his "story" about it.

'It seems that he had made quite a place for himself, there in Léogane, among the negroes and the ducks. In seven years a man like Carswell, with his mental and dispositional equipment, can go quite a long way, anywhere. He had managed to make quite a good thing out of his duck-drying industry, employed five or six "hands" in his little wooden "factory", rebuilt a rather good house he had secured there for a song right after he had arrived, collected local antiques to add to the equipment he had brought along with him, made himself a real home of a peculiar, bachelor kind, and, above all, got in solid with the Black People all around him. Almost incidentally I gathered from him – he had no gift of narrative, and I had to question him a great deal – he had

got onto, and into, the know in the *vodu* thing. There wasn't, as far as I could get it, any aspect of it all that he hadn't been in on, except, that is, "*la chevre sans cornes*" – the goat without horns, you know – the human sacrifice on great occasions. In fact, he strenuously denied that the *voduists* resorted to that; said it was a *canard* against them; that they never, really, did such things, never had, unless back in pre-historic times, in Guinea – Africa.

'But, there wasn't anything about it all that he hadn't at his very finger-ends, and at first-hand, too. The man was a walking encyclopedia of the native beliefs, customs, and practises. He knew, too, every turn and twist of their speech. He hadn't, as he had said at first, "gone native" in the slightest degree, and yet, without lowering his White Man's dignity by a trifle, he had got it all.

'That brings us to the specific happening, the "story" which, he had said, went along with his reason for coming in to the hospital in Port au Prince, to us.

'It appears that his sarcoma had never, practically, troubled. Beyond noting a very gradual increase in its size from year to year, he said, he "wouldn't know he had one". In other words, characteristically, it never gave him any pain or direct annoyance beyond the sense of the wretched thing being there, and increasing on him, and always drawing him closer to that end of life which the New York doctors had warned him about.

'Then, it had happened only three days before he came to the hospital, he had gone suddenly unconscious one afternoon, as he was walking down his shell path to his gateway. The last thing he remembered then was being "about four steps from the gate". When he woke up, it was dark. He was seated in a big chair on his own front gallery, and the first thing he noticed was that his fingers and thumbs were sore and ached very painfully. The next thing was that there were flares burning all along the edge of the gallery, and down

in the front yard, and along the road outside the paling fence that divided his property from the road, and in the light of these flares there swarmed literally hundreds of negroes, gathered about him and mostly on their knees; lined along the gallery and on the grounds below it; prostrating themselves, chanting, putting earth and sand on their heads; and, when he leaned back in his chair, something hurt the back of his neck, and he found that he was being nearly choked with the necklaces, strings of beads, gold and silver coin-strings, and other kinds, that had been draped over his head. His fingers, and the thumbs as well, were covered with gold and silver rings, many of them jammed on so as to stop the circulation.

‘From his knowledge of their beliefs, he recognized what had happened to him. He had, he figured, probably fainted, although such a thing was not at all common with him, going down the pathway to the yard gate, and the Blacks had supposed him to be possessed as he had several times seen Black people, children, old men and women, morons, chiefly, similarly “possessed”. He knew that, now that he was recovered from whatever had happened to him, the “worship” ought to cease and if he simply sat quiet and took what was coming to him, they would, as soon as they realized he was “himself” once more, leave him alone and he would get some relief from this uncomfortable set of surroundings; get rid of the necklaces and the rings; get a little privacy.

‘But – the queer part of it all was that they didn’t quit. No, the mob around the house and on the gallery increased rather than diminished, and at last he was put to it, from sheer discomfort – he said he came to the point where he felt he couldn’t stand it all another instant – to speak up and ask the people to leave him in peace.

‘They left him, he says, at that, immediately, without a protesting voice, but – and here was what started him on his

major puzzlement – they didn't take off the necklaces and rings. No – they left the whole set of that metallic drapery which they had hung and thrust upon him right there, and, after he had been left alone, as he had requested, and had gone into his house, and lifted off the necklaces and worked the rings loose, the next thing that happened was that old Pa'p Josef, the local *papaloi*, together with three or four other neighboring *papalois*, witch-doctors from near-by-villages, and followed by a very old man who was known to Carswell as the *hougan* or head witch-doctor of the whole countryside thereabouts, came in to him in a kind of procession, and knelt down all around him on the floor of his living-room, and laid down gourds of cream and bottles of red rum and cooked chickens, and even a big china bowl of Tannia soup – a dish he abominated, said it always tasted like soapy water to him! – and then backed out leaving him to these comestibles.

'He said that this sort of attention persisted in his case, right through the three days that he remained in his house in Léogane, before he started out for the hospital; would, apparently, be still going on if he hadn't come into Port au Prince to us.

'But – his coming in was not, in the least, because of this. It had puzzled him a great deal, for there was nothing like it in his experience, nor, so far as he could gather from their attitude, in the experience of the people about him, of the *papalois*, or even of the *hougan* himself. They acted, in other words, precisely as though the "deity" supposed to have taken up his abode within him had remained there, although there seemed no precedent for such an occurrence, and, so far as he knew, he felt precisely just as he had felt right along, that is, fully awake, and, certainly, not in anything like an abnormal condition, and, very positively, not in anything like a fainting-fit!

'That is to say, he felt precisely the same as usual except

that – he attributed it to the probability that he must have fallen on the ground that time when he lost consciousness going down the pathway to the gate (he had been told that passers-by had picked him up and carried him to the gallery where he had awakened, later, these Good Samaritans meanwhile recognizing that one of the “deities” had indwelt him) – he felt the same except for recurrent, almost unbearable pains in the vicinity of his lower abdominal region.

‘There was nothing surprising to him in this accession of the new painfulness. He had been warned that that would be the beginning of the end. It was in the rather faint hope that something might be done that he had come into the hospital. It speaks volumes for the man’s fortitude, for his strength of character, that he came in so cheerfully; acquiesced in what we suggested to him to do; remained with us, facing these comparatively slim chances with complete cheerfulness.

‘For – we did not deceive Carswell – the chances were somewhat slim. “Sixty-fourty” I had said, but as I afterward made clear to him, the favorable chances, as gleaned from the mortality tables, were a good deal less than that.

‘He went to the table in a state of mind quite unchanged from his accustomed cheerfulness. He shook hands good-bye with Doctor Smithson and me, “in case”, and also with Doctor Jackson, who acted as anesthetist.

‘Carswell took an enormous amount of ether to get him off. His consciousness persisted longer, perhaps, than that of any surgical patient I can remember. At last, however, Doctor Jackson intimated to me that I might begin, and, Doctor Smithson standing by with the retracting forceps, I made the first incision. It was my intention, after careful study of the X-ray plates, to open it up from in front, in an up-and-down direction, establish drainage directly, and, leaving the wound in the sound tissue in front of it open, to attempt to get it

healed up after removing its contents. Such is the technique of the major portion of successful operations.

‘It was a comparatively simple matter to expose the outer wall. This accomplished, and after a few words of consultation with my colleague, I very carefully opened it. We recalled that the X-ray had shown, as I mentioned, a triangular-shaped mass within. This apparent content we attributed to some obscure chemical coloration of the contents.

‘I made my incisions with the greatest care and delicacy, of course. The critical part of the operation lay right at this point, and the greatest exactitude was indicated.

‘At last the outer coats of it were cut through, and retracted, and with renewed caution I made the incision through the inmost wall of tissue. To my surprise, and to Doctor Smithson’s, the inside was comparatively dry. The gauze which the nurse attending had caused to follow the path of the knife, was hardly moistened. I ran my knife down below the original scope of that last incision, then upward from its upper extremity, greatly lengthening the incision as a whole, if you are following me.

‘Then, reaching my gloved hand within this long up-and-down aperture, I felt about and at once discovered that I could get my fingers in around the inner containing wall quite easily. I reached and worked my fingers in farther and farther, finally getting both hands inside and at last feeling my fingers touch inside the posterior or rear wall. Rapidly, now, I ran the edges of my hands around inside, and, quite easily, lifted out the “inside”. This, a mass weighing several pounds, of more or less solid material, was laid aside on the small table beside the operating-table, and, again pausing to consult with Doctor Smithson – the operation was going, you see, a lot better than either of us had dared to anticipate – and being encouraged by him to proceed to a radical step which we had not hoped to be able to take, I began the

dissection from the surrounding, normal tissue of the now collapsed walls. This, a long, difficult, and harassing job, was accomplished at the end of, perhaps, ten or twelve minutes of gruelling work, and the bag-like thing, now completely severed from the tissues in which it had been for so long imbedded, was placed also on the side table.

‘Doctor Jackson reporting favorably on our patient’s condition under the anesthetic, I now proceeded to dress the large aperture, and to close the body-wound. This was accomplished in a routine manner, and then, together, we bandaged Carswell, and he was taken back to his room to await awakening from the ether.

‘Carswell disposed of, Doctor Jackson and Doctor Smithson left the operating-room and the nurse started in cleaning up after the operation; dropping the instruments into the boiler, and so on – a routine set of duties. As for me, I picked up the shell in a pair of forceps, turned it about under the strong electric operating-light, and laid it down again. It presented nothing of interest for a possible laboratory examination.

‘Then I picked up the more or less solid contents which I had laid, very hastily, and without looking at it – you see, my actual removal of it had been done inside, in the dark for the most part and by the sense of feeling, with my hands, you will remember – I picked it up; I still had my operating-gloves on to prevent infection when looking over these specimens, and, still, not looking at it particularly, carried it out into the laboratory.

‘Canevin’ – Doctor Pelletier looked at me somberly through the very gradually fading light of late afternoon, the period just before the abrupt falling of our tropic dusk – ‘Canevin,’ he repeated, ‘honestly, I don’t know how to tell you! Listen now, old man, do something for me, will you?’

‘Why, yes – of course,’ said I, considerably mystified. ‘What is it you want me to do, Pelletier?’

'My car is out in front of the house. Come on home with me, up to my house, will you? Let's say I want to give you a cocktail! Anyhow, maybe you'll understand better when you are there; I want to tell you the rest up at my house, not here. Will you please come, Canevin?'

I looked at him closely. This seemed to me a very strange, an abrupt, request. Still, there was nothing whatever unreasonable about such a sudden whim on Pelletier's part.

'Why, yes, certainly I'll go with you, Pelletier, if you want me to.'

'Come on, then,' said Pelletier, and we started for his car.

The doctor drove himself, and after we had taken the first turn in the rather complicated route from my house to his, on the extreme airy top of Denmark Hill, he said, in a quiet voice:

'Put together, now, Canevin, certain points if you please, in this story. Note, kindly, how the Black people over in Léogane acted, according to Carswell's story. Note, too, that theory I was telling you about; do you recollect it clearly?'

'Yes,' said I, still more mystified.

'Just keep those two points in mind, then,' added Doctor Pelletier, and devoted himself to navigating sharp turns and plodding up two steep roadways for the rest of the drive to his house.

We went in and found his houseboy laying the table for his dinner. Doctor Pelletier is unmarried, keeps a hospitable bachelor establishment. He ordered cocktails, and the houseboy departed on this errand. Then he led me into a kind of office, littered with medical and surgical paraphernalia. He lifted some papers off a chair, motioned me into it, and took another near by. 'Listen, now!' he said, and held up a finger at me.

'I took that thing, as I mentioned, into the laboratory,' said

he. 'I carried it in my hand, with my gloves still on as aforesaid. I laid it down on a table and turned on a powerful light over it. It was only then that I took a good look at it. It weighed several pounds at least, was about the bulk and heft of a full-grown coconut, and about the same color as a hulled coconut, that is, a kind of medium brown. As I looked at it, I saw that it was, as the X-ray had indicated, vaguely triangular in shape. It lay over on one of its sides under that powerful light, and – Canevin, so help me God' – Doctor Pelletier leaned toward me, his face working, a great seriousness in his eyes – 'it moved, Canevin,' he murmured; 'and, as I looked – the thing *breathed*! I was just plain dumfounded. A biological specimen like that – does not move, Canevin! I shook all over, suddenly. I felt my hair prickle on the roots of my scalp. I felt chills go down my spine. Then I remembered that here I was, after an operation, in my own biological laboratory. I came close to the thing and propped it up, on what might be called its logical base, if you see what I mean, so that it stood as nearly upright as its triangular conformation permitted.

'Then I saw that it had faint yellowish markings over the brown, and that what you might call its skin was moving, and – as I stared at the thing, Canevin – two things like little arms began to move, and the top of it gave a kind of convulsive shudder, and it opened straight at me, Canevin, a pair of eyes and looked me in the face.

'Those eyes – my God, Canevin, those eyes! They were eyes of something more than human, Canevin, something incredibly evil, something vastly old, sophisticated, cold, immune from anything except pure evil, the eyes of something that had been worshipped, Canevin, from ages and ages out of a past that went back before all known human calculation, eyes that showed all the deliberate, lurking wickedness that has ever been in the world. The eyes closed, Canevin, and the

thing sank over onto its side, and heaved and shuddered convulsively.

'It was sick, Canevin; and now, emboldened, holding myself together, repeating over and over to myself that I had a case of the quavers, of post-operative "nerves", I forced myself to look closer, and as I did so I got from it a faint whiff of ether. Two tiny, ape-like nostrils, over a clamped-shut slit of a mouth, were exhaling and inhaling; drawing in the good, pure air, exhaling ether fumes. It popped into my head that Carswell had consumed a terrific amount of ether before he went under; we had commented on that, Doctor Jackson particularly. I put two and two together, Canevin, remembered we were in Haiti, where things are not like New York, or Boston, or Baltimore! Those Negroes had believed that the "deity" had not come out of Carswell, do you see? *That* was the thing that held the edge of my mind. The thing stirred uneasily, put out one of its "arms", groped about, stiffened.

'I reached for a near-by specimen-jar, Canevin, reasoning, almost blindly, that if this thing were susceptible to ether, it would be susceptible to – well, my gloves were still on my hands, and – now shuddering so that I could hardly move at all, I had to force every motion – I reached out and took hold of the thing – it felt like moist leather – and dropped it into the jar. Then I carried the carboy of preserving alcohol over to the table and poured it in till the ghastly thing was entirely covered, the alcohol near the top of the jar. It writhed once, then rolled over on its "back", and lay still, the mouth now open. Do you believe me, Canevin?'

'I have always said that I would believe anything, on proper evidence,' said I, slowly, 'and I would be the last to question a statement of yours, Pelletier. However, although I have, as you say, looked into some of these things perhaps more than most, it seems, well –'

Doctor Pelletier said nothing. Then he slowly got up out of his chair. He stepped over to a wall-cupboard and returned,

a wide-mouthed specimen-jar in his hand. He laid the jar down before me, in silence.

I looked into it, through the slightly discolored alcohol with which the jar, tightly sealed with rubber-tape and sealing-wax, was filled nearly to the brim. There, on the jar's bottom, lay such a thing as Pelletier had described (a thing which, if it had been 'seated', upright, would somewhat have resembled that representation of the happy little godling 'Billiken' which was popular twenty years ago as a desk ornament), a thing suggesting the sinister, the unearthly, even in this dessicated form. I looked long at the thing.

'Excuse me for even seeming to hesitate, Pelletier,' said I, reflectively.

'I can't say that I blame you,' returned the genial doctor. 'It is, by the way, the first and only time I have ever tried to tell the story to anybody.'

'And Carswell?' I asked. 'I've been intrigued with that good fellow and his difficulties. How did he come out of it all?'

'He made a magnificent recovery from the operation,' said Pelletier, 'and afterward, when he went back to Léogane, he told me that the Negroes, while glad to see him quite as usual, had quite lost interest in him as the throne of a "divinity".'

'H'm,' I remarked, 'it would seem, that, to bear out -'

'Yes,' said Pelletier, 'I have always regarded that fact as absolutely conclusive. Indeed, how otherwise could one possibly account for - *this*?' He indicated the contents of the laboratory jar.

I nodded my head, in agreement with him. 'I can only say that - if you won't feel insulted, Pelletier - that you are singularly open-minded, for a man of science! What, by the way, became of Carswell?'

The houseboy came in with a tray, and Pelletier and I drank to each other's good health.

'He came in to Port au Prince,' replied Pelletier after he

had done the honors. 'He did not want to go back to the States, he said. The lady to whom he had been engaged had died a couple of years before; he felt that he would be out of touch with American business. The fact is – he had stayed out here too long, too continuously. But, he remains an "authority" on Haitian native affairs, and is consulted by the High Commissioner. He knows, literally, more about Haiti than the Haitians themselves. I wish you might meet him; you'd have a lot in common.'

'I'll hope to do that,' said I, and rose to leave. The house-boy appeared at the door, smiling in my direction.

'The table is set for two, sar,' said he.

Doctor Pelletier led the way into the dining-room, taking it for granted that I would remain and dine with him. We are informal in St Thomas about such matters. I telephoned home and sat down with him.

Pelletier suddenly laughed – he was halfway through his soup at the moment. I looked up inquiringly. He put down his soup spoon and looked across the table at me.

'It's a bit odd,' he remarked, 'when you stop to think of it! There's one thing Carswell doesn't know about Haiti and what happens there!'

'What's that?' I inquired.

'That – thing – in there,' said Pelletier, indicating the office with his thumb in the way artists and surgeons do. 'I thought he'd had troubles enough without *that* on his mind, too.'

I nodded in agreement and resumed my soup. Pelletier has a cook in a thousand...

They Run Again

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

Beyond the black and naked wood
In frosty gold has set the sun,
And dusk glides forth in cobweb hood . . .
Sister, tonight the werewolves run!

With white teeth gleaming and eyes aflame
The werewolves gather upon the howe!
Country churl and village dame,
They have forgotten the wheel and plow.

They have forgotten the speech of men ;
Their throats are dry with a dreadful thirst ;
And woe to the traveler in the glen
Who meets tonight with that band accurst!

Now from the hollows creeps the dark ;
The moon like a yellow owl takes flight ;
Good people on their house-doors mark
A cross, and hug their hearths in fright.

Sister, listen! . . . The King-Wolf howls!

The pack is running! . . . Drink down the brew,
Don the unearthly, shaggy cowl, –
We must be running, too!

The Eyrie

For sixteen years *Weird Tales* has consistently endeavored to give its readers stories that are different from any to be found elsewhere. In addition to the best weird and fantastic stories obtainable, we have sought out and printed other highly imaginative tales, so plausibly told that they seem entirely possible and convincing. That we have succeeded in our purpose of presenting utterly *different* literary fare is attested by the multitudinous flood of enthusiastic letters from you, the readers, throughout the years this magazine has been published. Such a *different* story is *The Hollow Moon* in this issue, the story of a lunar vampire, written by an author whose previous vampire story, *The Canal*, was acclaimed by no less an authority than the late H. P. Lovecraft himself as one of the greatest vampire tales ever written. The next few months will be particularly rich in such highly original and utterly different tales, notable among them being *Giants of the Sky* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr, an unusual tale of vast beings in a super-cosmos who make our earth the object of an experiment; *King of the World's Edge* by H. Warner Munn, an intriguing weird novel of America

in King Arthur's time, with Merlin as one of its principal characters; and *Spawn* by P. Schuyler Miller, as powerful and strange a tale as it has ever been our good fortune to present to you, our readers.

The Very Top

Herbert Vincent Ross writes from London: '*Weird Tales* has traveled steadily upward to the very top of literary weird art. Take the tale by Manly Wade Wellman in the October issue, *Up Under the Roof*, which was a perfect example of the modern *Weird Tales*. What a little gem that was, and fit to be included in any modern anthology! And then H. P. Lovecraft's *The Other Gods*, which was so typical of that great master of bizarre fiction. Was not HPL truly the master of them all, even including Poe, Beirce, Machen, Dunsany? I think the answer is "yes" and that in time his work will take its proper place amongst the world's classics. Congratulations also to Clark Ashton Smith for his *Maze of Maal Dweb*, which was also the sort of thing we expect from this unique poet and artist; for Smith is an artist, an artist of words, and none draws more vividly or more romantically than he. *The Black Monk* by Pendarves was passable, but I expect better from this writer, and in any case I tumbled to the plot before I was halfway through the story. Brother Ignatius was a dead give-away for the Black Monk, and so it proved; but still it was passable. *Witches on the Heath*, the poem by Leah Bodine Drake, was good and also really weird; the line, "Somebody played in the twisted tree," left quite a lot to the imagination, which is as it should be in a work such as this. And now a grumble. I realize I am only one reader amongst many thousands, but do readers really like those "formula" tales by Edmond Hamilton like *The Fire Princess*? Ah well, I suppose they do or you would not print them; but

for me, although it was a hot fire, it left me cold. Hamilton can do good things, we know, for he has given us *Isle of the Sleeper*, *Child of the Winds* (very fine), *He that Hath Wings*, etc. These are always welcome, but I for one would not miss the type of *The Fire Princess*, which is a sort of mixture of adventure, weird science-fiction, all mixed up, making gosh only knows what!

Difficult to Find Words

Ralph Rayburn Phillips writes from Portland, Oregon: 'Some of the stories in *Weird Tales* are of such high quality that it is difficult to find words expressive enough when one wishes to comment. *A Thunder of Trumpets* by Robert E. Howard and Frank Thurston Torbett is superb. It is far more than a mere story, as every student of the Wisdom of the East knows; one must be a student to appreciate it fully. I desire to congratulate these brilliant writers who have given us such a story. Seabury Quinn in *More Lives than One* has also given us a wonderful story. His *Roads* is another. Both these stories contain truths which make them far more than stories. Mr Quinn is truly a great writer. Only *Weird Tales*, the incomparable magazine, could present us such an amazing story as *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, by the master, H. P. Lovecraft, who has gone on to higher worlds. We feel his loss keenly.'

That Circe Cover

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: 'Circe's gown on the cover of the March issue is really a jewel-toned blue – an excellent color illustration. To get to Ball's story of *The Swine of Æaea* – it was very enjoyable, altho I didn't care much

for the listener breaking in on the yarn. Would prefer just the narrative without one feller telling t'other feller. Oh – oo – horrors! Quinn did up an ugly one this time with the mad scientist. I shuddered at the plight of the bewful opera coloratura. You did right well by yourself in this tale, sir. F'ebben's sakes! – Derleth s'prised me no end with *The Return of Hastur*. Somehow I didn't mind the suggestion of inconceivable beings – & how well the ending – that pillar of light removing the struggling things and casting them afar. Altho some exciting events were included in this instalment of *Fearful Rock*, it seemed summat slow. Bein' as how the next issue closes the story, it should be truly exciting. That metal box bothers me much. Howard's poem, *Desert Dawn*, is superbly worded. Finlay's selection for his full-page illustration is well chosen – it is horrifying to see Satan as he "fondles a screaming thing"! And this *Comrades of Time* story – thanks to Mr Hamilton for most enjoyable reading. The whole was so packed with excitement – even the thought of those people from centuries apart, to meet. It was very well done. Lovecraft's delightful fantasy, *The Quest of Iranon*, seemed almost a fable. It was a bit touching at the end, yet on the whole it was quite a treat. Of all the startling stories, the reprint of Bassett Morgan's *The Devils of Po Sung* cops the cream. This devil Po Sung dabbled in all the meanest arts of evil. A brilliant fellow, but yes! Shux! – can't find a thing for comment in the Eyrie this month. Am I slipping?"

Doubts Silenced

C. S. Youd writes from Eastleigh, England: 'I must honestly say that when the change of owners first occurred I had grave misgivings, but with the first enlarged issue my doubts were effectively silenced. The best in the issue was Smith's *The Double Shadow*, which easily surpassed the rest of the stories.

Nathan Hindin took second place, but there were no stories with which I could really quarrel. Of the verse, Howard's was quite Chestertonian in character and as attractive as that great writer's.'

A Veritable Proteus

E. Hoffmann Price, of Kurdistan and points west, writes: 'Derleth's interesting yarn in the March issue is a colorful tribute to his late master, HLP. The sage of Providence did what very few accomplish: start a school of mythology! And Derleth, I think, has more of the real touch than any other of the disciples. Amazingly versatile, Derleth. A veritable Proteus. Somehow, it struck me that HPL's yarn, *The Quest of Iranon*, symbolized his own career. This is hard to explain, but that was the reaction. It left me with the conviction that that beautiful bit of writing was rightly kept until after his death, and then published as an epitaph. Perhaps I have this idea because of his oft-repeated statement to the effect that the longer he worked and studied, the further he was from his aim as a writer; an estimate that no one shared with him.'

An Outstanding Issue

Charles H. Chandler writes from Wooster, Ohio: 'The issue for March was an outstanding one. The cover was beautiful – better than any for a long time – better even than last October's cover, which is saying quite a bit. Finlay deserves high praise for his work this month . . . His full-page illustration this month was also outstanding, although I prefer his line and stipple work to his charcoal. He certainly does like Sterling's *A Wine of Wizardry* – nor do I blame him, for it's a fearful and wonderful poem . . . In my opinion, *The Return*

of *Hastur* was the best story in the March issue, and one of the best you have ever printed. It is a true weird tale – fulfils every requirement, and a good job at that – imaginative, really creepy, convincing, and the rest of it. Those *soggy* footsteps, for instance, and the strange noises that permeated the sub-basement in the night. It is a story that will not be quickly forgotten. Derleth has also tied together a great many loose ends of local color, with his associating and organizing the books we have heard so much about: 'viz., *De Vermis Mysteriis*, the *Necronomicon*, *Book of Eibon*, and the rest, even bringing in good old WT – which is as it should be . . . Second place in the issue goes, I think, to *The Quest of Iranon*, although *The Swine of Æaea* is a close third in my opinion. The former's beauty gives it the edge . . . *The Stratosphere Menace* wasn't even good science-fiction – much less a weird tale. It was childish and out of place. *Smoke Fantasy* was at least weird – I'll say that much for it. However, these brickbats are negligible; an issue containing seven good stories may certainly be forgiven a couple of bad ones. Maybe they were just bad by comparison.'

Magnificently Composed

Robert A. Madle writes from Philadelphia: 'Far and away the best story in the March issue is H. P. Lovecraft's masterpiece of fantasy, *The Quest of Iranon*. I am almost tempted to say that this tale is the greatest you have ever published by HPL. *The Quest of Iranon* is one of the most magnificently composed pieces of writing I have ever read. If there are any other pieces of pure fantasy by HPL still unpublished, I advise you to grab them up in a hurry. *The Return of Hastur*, an unusual story for Derleth, and Clifford Ball's *The Swine of Æaea* take second and third honors respectively. The reprint in the February issue, *The Last Horror*, was a classic; one of the most enthralling stories I have ever read.'

Going Places

Paul N. Nicholaioff writes from New York: 'After finishing reading the March issue of *Weird Tales* I couldn't help writing and letting you know how much I enjoyed it. First, the cover was excellent and striking. Inside illustrations were great, and I notice Virgil can apply his pens, brushes and inks in various ways which few artists can use. And what do you know – four illustrations for the yarn by Ball! *Weird Tales* seems to be going places since the change in publishers.'

Reprint Suggestions

B. M. Reynolds writes from North Adams, Massachusetts: '*Weird Tales* certainly "went to town" this month in its new 160-page augmented edition. You are "tops" now in the fantasy-fiction field in both size and quality and I sincerely hope this new achievement will gain for you many new friends and supporters. I was more than delighted to read of the return of some of the old-time contributors to your pages, C. L. Moore, Donald Wandrei, H. Warner Munn and Clark Ashton Smith. As to the contents of the issue: Thomas P. Kelley again takes first honors with *I Found Cleopatra*. I eagerly await his next novel. Second place goes to Donald Wandrei for *Giant-Plasm*. Third place I award to Clark Ashton Smith and Henry Kuttner, equally, for *The Double Shadow*, an exceptionally well-written piece of fantasy, and *The Transgressor*, which gives a unique and ironical twist to the theory of time-travel. The balance of the issue was well up to standard. It seems to me that, in its new format, WT could now easily reprint some of the longer best stories from past issues, without stealing too much space from the new ones. Even an occasional reprint serial should now meet with

the approval of your readers, and there are some bang-up good ones such as *Golden Blood* and *Drome*. As to the shorter reprints: *Bimini*, *Lochinvar Lodge*, *The Space-Eaters*, *Something from Above*, *Isle of the Fairy Morgana*, *The Wand of Doom*, and *The Arctic Death* would, I am sure, be greatly welcomed by a great majority of us.'

Hard-Earned Pennies

Eleanor Elizabeth B. writes from Kennebunk, Maine: 'Several cheers for the March issue. Bend your little pink ear and let me whisper that I was scared practically out of my few wits after that session with Derleth's *The Return of Hastur*. Living not so very far from the scene of the – er – crime as I do, it was sort of hair-raising to wonder why Innsmouth is so shunned (if it is). Seabury Quinn's story is a humdinger as usual, but I think the cream of this month's crop was good old Eddie Hamilton's *Comrades of Time*. I take back everything I ever said about science-fiction. This one has everything, and I hope he brings back all those characters in other stories. My apologies, Eddie; I "done you wrong" in my thoughts . . . I still think WT is the tops in spookiness. I know whereof I speak, 'cause I've thrown away lots of hard-earned pennies trying to find a magazine even half as good, while waiting for the next issue of WT; then I could kick something *hard* when the trashy ones don't come up to WT. Not that I really expected that they could. One more nosegay: the poems you print are grand.'

Robert W. Chambers

Lester Anderson writes from San Francisco: 'I should like to say a word about the current WT. Derleth in *The Return of*

Hastur continues the Lovecraft tradition of "Elder God" tales. Good boy, August. Keep it up. Ball's *The Swine of Æaea* was good – better than his other tales. I never was a super-fan of the Conan-type fantasy. Kuttner's *The Transgressor* was delightful . . . May I request the reprinting of Robert W. Chambers's appropriate short fantasies which appeared in *The King in Yellow* and *The Maker of Moons*? Also the excerpt from another of his tales – *The Dark Star*, I think, is the title – dealing with the gods Derleth mentioned in *Hastur*. In the reprint section I suggest little-known hard-to-locate tales (not reprinted in anthologies).'

Only One Grouse

Basil H. Appleyard writes from London: 'I have only recently been introduced to your magazine and would like to express my appreciation of the really splendid matter which it contains. Over here in England it is rather difficult to obtain regular supplies and I am eagerly awaiting my news agent's next consignment. There is no doubt about it, I shall have to become a regular subscriber . . . Finlay's illustrations are unspeakably real and weird, and the work he puts into them must be colossal. I have only one grouse against the magazine – it should be three times as large, and also it is a hellish thing to be reading by candlelight whilst watching over someone who is doing his best to croak, which was my job a short while ago.'

A Poet's Comments

Clark Ashton Smith writes from his home in California: 'The March issue of WT is certainly an excellent one. *The Metal Chamber*, *The Swine of Æaea*, *The Return of Hastur*, and

The Quest of Iranon are all notably good. And I mustn't forget the reprint of Bassett Morgan's brain-surgery horror, *The Devils of Po Sung*, which still remains one of the best stories ever written on that theme.'

Concise Comments

W. M. Jones writes from New York City: '*Weird Tales* is and has been, and probably will continue to be, one of the real adventures in reading. Keep up the good work!'

ELIZABETH

Jessica Hamilton

A REFLECTION OF EVIL . . .

‘If you were to go into your bedroom tonight – perhaps by candlelight – and sit quietly before the large mirror, you might see what I have seen. Sit patiently, looking neither at yourself nor at the glass. You might notice that the image is not yours, but that of an exceptional person who lived at some other time . . .’

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